

## **Ralph Belt – World War II**

This will be an attempt (after 50 years) to tell any of my descendents, if any of them would happen to be interested, just *what in thunder* I did to help the war effort (at least I thought I did) in World War II.

In case you are doing family research, I was born on Stapleton Street in Oil Hill, Kansas, 6 July 1923, to Atlas Delno and Vietta Elizabeth (Ruckle) Belt. Oil Hill does not exist any more; it was an oil-boom town that supplied a good deal of the oil for World War I, and after the oil field played out, it slowly faded away.

My Dad, A.D. Belt, worked in the oil fields, and when a new field was discovered at Haverhill, we moved there when I was 6 years old. I went through grade school there and through high school in Augusta.

After graduating from high school I went to Salina and worked on the pre-cut crew helping to build Camp Phillips with Paul Tinney, Perk Powers and Max Hathaway. When we left there, I came back to Augusta and went to work at the White Eagle Refinery until I enlisted in the Marines.

I knew it wasn't going to be too long before I had to go, so I went to Wichita to enlist in the air force. I did so want to learn to fly and be a pilot, but as my luck would have it both the Army and the Navy had all the people they could take for pilot training; so I though. To hell with it and went down to the Marines and said, here I am, and signed up. It would be a week or two before they called me and told me when to be at the train depot to ship out.

I cannot remember, after this much time has gone by, but I don't recall anyone going with me when I reported to the train depot in Wichita. Anyway, I did report there,

and as I recall, the recruiting sergeant put three or four of us on the train to Kansas City where we were taken to the recruiting office. There about 20 of us were sworn in on 20 November 1942. Among them was Barney Barngrover, who had worked with my brother Carl at Beech aircraft, and was to become one of my best friends in the Marine Corps. Barney had a brother in the Marine Corps stationed in Kansas City to help swear us in. He was to survive the war; Barney did not.

After the swearing in we were put on a train called the “Challenger,” which took

us West through Salt Lake City, more recruits, and California. It was a from Kansas City to avoided probably

BOOT

in Los Angeles this knew about how big



Kansas, Colorado and on to where we picked up a few finally on to Los Angeles,

non-stop game of craps

Los Angeles, which I

due to the lack of money.

CAMP: When we arrived

country boy was in awe! I

Los Angeles was; it was

completely blacked out, but not to the point that you couldn't see all of the barrage

balloons hanging all around the city, and they were the first I had ever seen.

Anyway, a non-com (non-commissioned officer) met us at Los Angeles and told

us to “fall in.” It was the first, but by far not the last time I was to hear this command.

After explaining what “fall in” was he took a long look at how sorry we were according

to Marine Corps standards and I think I saw a few tears in his eyes. He escorted us all to

the Marine base in San Diego, to a barracks where we could clean up a little before being

told, "The smoking lamp was out." He then explained to us that all smoking would cease. We were to hear that a few million more times, too. That was about 9:00 P.M. or 2100 if you were in the Marine Corps and by this time there was no doubt about that.

Reveille (that's when you get up to a bugler, and don't dare to be late) was at 0500 the next morning (or 5 A.M. civilian time). We thought there must be something special going on, and found out they got up at this time every day! As soon as they got us going, they took us to the mess hall (where you get all of that good chow), where you sat up straight and properly ate EVERYTHING you took (take as much as you want, eat everything you take)! If you didn't you got to eat it just before you washed your mess gear, which will teach you not to take too much BUTTER! It was during chow we saw a bunch of "retreads"; guys who had been out of the Corps for a while and were now back in. They were about 30 to 40 years old and didn't look any happier than we were.

That day our heads were clipped as closely as they possibly could be. And as I remember, we spent the rest of the day running around as bare as a newborn baby getting physicals from about 100 doctors. We just went from one to another, whatever their field of medicine happened to be. I went into one room where there was a whole raft of bottles and each one had a Marine's number on it. There stood Barngrover with a woebegone look on his face. I asked him what the matter was and he told me he had been taking medicine that made his urine purple. He asked me if I would fill his bottle for him. I said "sure" and filled both our bottles, making a friend for life. Next we received our gear: toothbrush, soap and such, all of our clothing, shoes, socks and an ink pad and stamp with our names to stamp all our clothes with. Then we were instructed to send all our civilian clothes home.

There were about 50 guys in our platoon, and one day right after we got a bunch of shots, our D.I. (drill instructor) dumped out enough boxing gloves for everyone and told us to put them on and start boxing. We did that and I picked out a guy to box with, and was doing all right until someone behind me hit me on the side of the head and I saw stars! I think it was Barngrover. What it amounted to was a free-for-all with boxing gloves, and the D.I. was standing back enjoying it.

We had two D.I.'s. Scott had either been on sea duty or had attended sea school. He was sharp and later at the rifle range taught us the manual of arms, which he wasn't supposed to do. We did this after sunset, so it was dark and nobody paid attention to what we were doing. Sergeant Day was a retread. He had 20 years in, retired and was called back in and made a drill instructor. He became more like a father figure to us than anything. He had been out long enough that he was learning a lot of things right along with us. I really don't know how he put up with us "kids" I remember one piece of advice he gave us regarding orders; he said, "don't be a SEA LAWYER." If I order you to tear down that gun emplacement (there was an anti-aircraft gun with about 500 sand bags around it) and put it back together in 5 minutes, I don't expect you to be able to do it, but by God you had better try!

One day they told us we were going to play "drop the handkerchief" and you should have heard the comments about Marines playing kid games. Anyway, they got us in a big circle and brought out the handkerchief. It was a tube of canvas about 20 inches long and filled about 2/3 of the way with sand. The object was to drop it behind someone, and then try to get all the way around the circle without getting knocked on

your ass. If you were slow or the one chasing you was fleet of foot, you could get knocked unconscious.

We learned to drill, detail strip weapons, say “YES SIR,” wash our clothes, make beds, get a lot of shots, and all that good stuff. We had to qualify for swimming. If you didn’t qualify, you went back every evening until you did, while everyone else went to the movies!

After we learned our daily routine, we transferred to the rifle range, located at El Cajon, California, and learned how to fire M-1’s at 100, 200, 300 and 500 yards. Then back to boot camp. When we graduated we got to ask for assignments (not that you got what you wanted). I asked for the Paratroops and got it. I found out later that only one in twenty, who asked for it, got to go the Paratroop School.

When boot training broke up, they trucked us out to Camp Gillespie and we started through paratroop school: first jumping off a 250 foot captive tower, then riding down cables to the fly-away tower where you floated free from the tower and also made your required night jump. We learned to pack our chute (yes, you jumped the chute that you packed, and when you jumped out at 1,000 feet and it didn’t open, you took it to your packing instructor and he told you why). After the jump training, we did about 2 hours of calisthenics and then ran the 5 miles around the compound every evening. Then we could go to chow, take a shower and write home to tell everyone how much fun we were having.

When we got our legs built up enough they put us in some junky transports (DC 5’s), took us up 1,000 feet, flew us over our field and had us jump. It was safer than trying to land in those planes. One day, about the time they got us loaded, one of the

engines caught fire. They unloaded us till the fire was out, loaded us back on, we taxied to the end of the runway and started to turn around to take off and blew out a tire. They had to send over to the naval airfield for another plane. After seven jumps we got our wings and drew another \$50 for jump pay. That made it about \$100 a month. At that time \$100 looked pretty good to this little ole country boy!

After that we did police duty (clean up) and watched the other platoons jump. One day as they were coming out of the plane of the guy's snaps on his anchor cable broke and we watched him fall and fall. We were yelling "open it, open it!" all the way. He finally cracked his QAC (quick attachable chute) about a hundred feet above the ground, tore the hell out of his QAC, but he was ok. That was as close as I came to seeing a bad accident.

After that we went to camp Elliott for a week, then aboard the USS Mount Vernon (it had been a luxury liner) at San Diego and headed overseas. We didn't know where we were going until we got to New Caledonia. I had no idea how big that ship was until we got a little away from it and looked back and it was BIG!

I lost my sea bag there but made it out to the second Parachute Battalion as a replacement. When we got to the camp Barngrover, Bill Leonard and I got tired of standing around so we started singing. All the time it was raining cats and dogs. Captain Manchester heard us singing and told whoever was in charge that he wanted the three of us in his company; so we got assigned to "E" Company.

We turned in our M-1's and drew Johnson rifles, and I drew new clothes to replace the ones I lost in the sea bag. After that it was train, train, train, and we got used

to being in “E” Company. We even got used to the ever-loving mosquitoes; they were the biggest and there were more of them than you can imagine.

I don't know just when, but one day one of our guys drew a detail and when he came back he said there was something in the wind. They had torn down the officers' liquor storeroom and poured the booze all together in chow cans. After supper that day they took it all outside of camp and told us to bring our mess cups; they were going to give us all one cup of booze. We took our canteens and drew a cup, put it in our canteen and got back in line again and again. Needless to say that was one drunk battalion that night.

On 10 September 1943 we got on the U.S.A.T. ship Noordam (which was a Dutch ship) and arrived at Guadalcanal 21 September 1943, where we lived in pup tents while we were there. They used us to unload ships 24 hours a day. Late in September 1943 we got on an LST VSA 448 and arrived at Vella LaVella on 1 October 1943. We just got a few trucks off when a Jap dive-bomber dropped a bomb right through the front elevator while it was down and we lost about everything we owned. We didn't do too much training there because it was so ever loving hot, but we did draw new gear and got ready to move on up the Islands.

CHOISUEL: We loaded onto three APD's (Navy Destroyers) the night of 27 October 1943, from Juno Beach, Vella LaVella, and EVERYTHING was blacked out, and I do mean blacked out, you couldn't see a thing. We landed at Voza Village, Choisuel (British Solomon Islands) at 12:45 A.M. While we were landing a Jap came over and dropped two bombs, but did no damage.

They left us (2<sup>nd</sup> Paratroop Battalion), around 300 of us, on the Island with four Higgins Boats that would hold about 20 men each. The 3 APD's were gone a long time before daylight, which meant that if we got into trouble we were going to have to fight because we didn't have a way off that Island.

The natives had cut trails for us before we got there, so we didn't have any trouble getting back into the jungle about 1,000 yards and getting started moving in supplies of canned chow, radio equipment, etc.

We hung our hammocks in trees and they (as everything we had) were camouflaged a jungle green. We had left our boats on Zinga Island under guard and camouflage and the next night the Japs bombed and strafed the island trying to get the boats, but they did no damage. Meanwhile we were back in the jungle making the best of camp, washing in a small stream just off campsite. There were a bunch of us in the stream when someone yelled, "freeze" and we all froze while a Jap recon flew right over us! Oh yes, they knew we were there and about where we were! Now the trick was to do what we were sent to do and get the hell out of there!

About 0400 the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> we were awakened and told to go down to the beach to defend it. It was as dark out as I have ever seen it in that jungle, and it was raining, to boot. You could not see the man ahead of you; you had to hold on to his duty belt. We got to the beach and turned to our left and kept moving, and all the time we could hear Jap barges going by, a lot of them.

We crossed a small stream that was running pretty good and about the time we all got across we heard a shot behind us. I could hear them passing a word back, and when it got to me it was, "Belt, go see what that shot was." I waded back across that stream and



started back. All I could make out was the lightness of the sand on the beach. I saw a little darker shape up toward the jungle, so I went up till I was about a foot from it and decided it was a bush, so went on down the beach quite a way and did not find a soul. I started back and when I got to the river I went back over to this dark shape and got right down to it trying to see what it was and this guy says "whatta you want?" Like to scared me to death! I asked what the shot was and he said it was an accidental discharge. So I waded back across the river and started looking for my platoon. Pretty soon a guy whispered "Belt?" and I answered in the affirmative.

We set up a defense, as much as we could along this little river, which was running pretty good on account of all the rain, which was still coming down. We lay there in that slop along that riverbank and tried to get a little sleep. Something would wake you up and it was usually a land crab running across you. One time one got a very firm grip on one of my fingers!

Come daylight we got up and took the barrels out of our Johnson rifles. (They were the best rifles that were in the service as far as the Paratroops were concerned.) We washed them out in the river, put them back together and went on our way to raid a Jap camp.

We made our way down this trail very quietly (both "E" & "F" companies) and had to stop several times to get across little streams; the last one was a full-fledged river. We had one boat that belonged to the natives and that was how we got across. "F" Company went first because they were to cut away from "E" Company and go back into the jungle on a little trail that the natives had cut on the Q.T. ahead of time. Well, by the time we got all of "E" Company across that river, the Captain was getting a little antsy,

and he was hurrying us along because he thought "F" Company was going to get in position behind the Japs before we got there.

We had been traveling in THICK jungle most of the time and at one point one of my buddies told me to look at a tree branch ahead and above the trail. I took a look and there was a lizard I'll bet was eight feet long laying on a branch right above the trail! If we hadn't been on that raid, those natives would have been trying to catch it; they ate them. After we crossed the big river we were moving along pretty well, but the Captain thought we were going too slow. He took the lead squad off point and told our squad leader to take point and step out FAST, which I'm here to tell you we did!

We were in a coconut grove now and had a pretty good trail and were moving out when all of a sudden we saw a Jap about 100 yards away coming from the ocean on his way to his camp. We knew we were pretty close and were afraid he might have spotted us, but he apparently did not see us. We started stepping out just that much faster down that trail. I kept looking off to the side and saw Jap bunkers all along and on both sides of that trail with heavy machine guns in every one of them. It fairly well made the hair on the back of my neck crawl. If they would have had those guns manned, they could have pretty well wiped out "E" Company. Thank God they didn't have a one of them manned!

When we got to where we had seen the Jap our squad went straight on to secure the flank on that side and most of the company turned left and set up mortars, firing right into the Jap camp with them, rifles and light machine-gun fire. As soon as they started firing the Japs took off the other way and when they got to the edge of the jungle they ran right into "F" Company, which was just getting there, but fixed well enough to play hell

with the Japs. Back where we were, another squad had set up some rocket ramps and started firing at a small Jap boat that was anchored out a little way. I think they sank it.

This all happened about 1430 (2:30 P.M.) and it was getting late when we finished up. They sent a landing craft to pick some of us up; the rest started back by foot. The landing craft returned to take another load of us from where we had walked. The report read: "When "E" Company pushed the Japs out of camp and into "F" Company, "F" Company was still in a column of files. "F" Company attacked and as soon as the Jap position was fixed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon was sent around the Jap left flank. Japs immediately set up knee mortars, Mabu machine-guns, and put snipers in the trees. After 15 minutes of heavy fighting, Japs had been pushed back 150 yards, leaving snipers in the middle of our position. At that time the Japs launched a Banzai attack, which was broken up by two A-4 sections (heavy machine guns); 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon was sent around the Jap right flank to prevent withdrawal; 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon, which by this time was around the Jap left flank and behind them, killed many and wounded more; about 40 got away.

Fox Company reorganized, treated casualties and began withdrawal over a different route from the approach. The trail passed through most difficult terrain. Casualties made the move extremely slow. Final phase of the withdrawal was through trackless jungle in the dark.

Easy Company, during Fox Company's firefight, moved into Sangigai village behind retreating Japs, destroyed the entire installation, food, medical supplies, fuel, communications, ammunition, buildings and a barge, captured documents and charts and miscellaneous equipment, blew up emplacements and caves, and then withdrew through the bush.

Comparative casualties: Enemy – 72 dead, probably more; undetermined number of wounded (doubt if wounded could be treated, as we destroyed all medical supplies). Our forces: 6 dead, 1 missing, 12 wounded. Consider raid material success. Some of the documents that we capture from that raid were IMPORTANT. They showed minefields and barge routes at Bougainville, Shortland, Fauru and Bailale, and we were getting ready to move into that area.

After the raid on Sangigai, my company didn't do much more than set up defense around the area. We were camped in and around the village (Voza) on the beach area where we landed. Meanwhile "F" and "G" companies were doing raids on other parts of the island to make it look like a LOT of people had landed on the island. On 1 November 1943 one of the patrols hit a Jap patrol of 20 and killed 8 of them, but lost a pretty good friend of mine, PFC Provost. I played a lot of poker with him.

On 2 November 1943 we had about 1,800 Japs south of us and 2,000 to 3,000 north of us and closing in. Report said that we could hold out for about a week if we had to pull back into the mountains; we had about a week's supply of food and 1-½ units of ammo. We asked for air and PT support and got an airdrop with land mines.

We had been hitting small Jap camps along a 25-mile front along the beach, and at first the Japs thought there were a lot of us, but as we kept pulling out as soon as an attack was over, they began to realize that we were a small group and they became more aggressive and began moving in on us.

One company was out on patrol trying to hook up with another patrol and had to bed down that night and the next morning started a firefight with a Jap patrol. Before it was over with they had to radio for support. The landing boats were sent and about the

time they got them picked up a couple of PT boats came in to help with all their firepower and picked up casualties. One of them was Corporal Schnell, who died in the bunk of the PT skipper, who was Lieutenant John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who as it happens later became the President of the United States. That raid killed 42 Japs, we lost one dead, one missing, one wounded and one wounded and captured.

We had sent patrols out both ways from our position on the beach at Voza village until they ran into Japs; then they started setting booby traps all the way back. Meanwhile we made ourselves at home at Voza. We found a big box of green tea the Japs had left behind and made ourselves some; however, we had to skim the bugs off the top after we got it made and it really wasn't all that bad.

We were waiting to see what the word was, and all the time we were hearing those booby traps going off on both sides of Voza village, and every one that went off was a little closer. It was getting a little nerve racking. This was all happening on 3 November 1943 and I realized I had just spent my mother's birthday and Halloween harassing the Japs.

By 2300 Jap patrols were pretty much all around us. At 0130 the morning of 3 November 1943 someone whispered that the ships were here. Flat-bottomed LCI's had pulled in VERY QUIETLY and we got up and very quietly went to the beach and waded out in water up to our armpits and boarded those LCI's. They eased out away from the beach and we were on our way back to Vella LaVella, and didn't have to fire a shot getting off that beach. The LCI's hooked lines to the two surviving landing boats that had our radios on them, but they were leaking so badly they had to cut them loose and let them sink.

We later learned from the coast watcher we left behind that the Japs hit the beach where we had been 45 minutes after we pulled out. They also caught a bunch of natives moving some of the supplies we had left and killed about 20 of them. Coast watcher also reported that Gallagher and Johnson had been captured and tied to coconut trees and used for bayonet practice. Is there any wonder that there was never any mercy shown to these people?

We arrived back at Vella LaVella at 0800 4 November 1943. I remember very well that while we were still on the LCI's we could see about a quarter of a mile of meat wagons (ambulances) lined up bumper-to-bumper waiting for us. Apparently the word was that we were going to have to fight our way off the beach and after they got that word they stopped any radio communication because those slow flat-bottomed boats we were on would have been sitting ducks. Anyway we didn't need all of those meat wagons and we unloaded and went back to our camp for a well-earned rest and a full night's sleep.

General A.A. Vandergrift in his Commendation said "A series of raids by your Marine Parachute Battalion resulted in the destruction of several hundred tons of Japanese supplies, the capture of Japanese documents of great value to our nation, the devastation of an enemy barge and staging area at Sangigai. During the period on Choiseul, 143 Japanese were killed and an undetermined number wounded with a loss of only eight killed and thirteen wounded in your battalion."

We left Vella LaVella 2 January 1944 aboard landing craft and landed at Guadalcanal on 3 January 1944. We embarked on the USS Meteor 17 January 1944 at

Guadalcanal, sailed 18 January 1944, arrived and disembarked at San Diego, California 4 February 1944.

After returning stateside and spending about two weeks getting checked out for malaria, we got 30 days leave to go home. I got back to Kansas in the dead of winter and coming from the South Pacific, I about froze my butt off all the time I was home!

I reported back to camp Pendleton to B/1/27 and started training again. We didn't have any idea for what. Every time I could I would drop by the office and ask for an transfer to the Marine Air Corp. I got the same answer every time: NO. I guess they got tired of that and one day the Captain called me in and said he had been going over my records and noticed I wasn't married, had passed my swimming test the first time, had been an assistant light machine gunner and a demolition man in the Paratroops. He really piled it on, and then asked if I would volunteer for the assault squad. I asked "what the hell is that?" and was told we would be trained on the flame throwers, bangalore torpedoes, semaphore, demolitions, booby traps, and all special weapons, etc. I thought going to school for all that would be better than training in the field. I should have known that anything that needed all that buttering up couldn't be too good a deal, but I was young and full of it so I went along and "volunteered" for the assault squad.

School wasn't too bad a deal. I helped teach demolitions and had a couple of close calls. One time a bunch of jerks put a big charge under a junked ten-wheel truck about fifty yards away, and when I heard it go off I turned just in time to see one of the fenders coming my way. I hit the ground since there was no cover around. Another time I turned around just in time to see one of MY men start to crimp a cap in the middle of it! I yelled at him and he stopped. Had he finished mashing the middle of the cap it

probably would have gone off. And then there was semaphore. I asked what we had to learn that for and was told that it was going to be our job to stand on the back of the landing craft and semaphore to shore for landing instructions from the beach master. I thought to myself “they’ve got to be kidding!” As it turned out we never had to use it and with the schooling we got they never would’ve received the message anyway! I was put in charge of the squad and about six weeks later I made Corporal.

We trained at Camp Pendleton for almost six months and then loaded ships at San Diego, and then got sent to Hawaii. We had more training there and on 10 January 1945 packed our sea bags and stored them at Camp Tarawa. Carrying only transport packs, we got on an LST 634 and made a practice landing on one of the islands.

We left the Hawaiian Islands aboard the USS Hansford on 18 January 1945, but we didn’t know where we were going. We awoke one morning at daybreak and were in the Marshall Islands. When I went out on deck I never saw so many ships in my life! They were anchored in all directions as far as the eye could see. We just picked up mail and supplies and I think it was the next day that we left there. On 11 February 1945 we got off the USS Hansford and onto LST 241; it had an OPEN LCT (Landing Craft Tank) sitting on top of it and boomed down like you wouldn’t believe. Guess what, that’s where our Company was to bed down for the next few days, rain and all!

We spent the next eight days sharpening our K-Bar knives, getting our gear ready, and drawing ammunition, demolitions, K-rations, water, flamethrowers, and being briefed about the gun emplacements on the island. They had a four foot by eight foot piece of plywood with a rubber map on it, contoured just like the island with all the known gun emplacements. One day after we drew all that stuff, we were sitting around



cleaning our weapons. After Pegg cleaned his 45-auto he slid the magazine in, then pulled the slide back just a little to be sure there was not a round in the chamber, let it go forward and pulled the trigger. Well, he had pulled the slide a little farther than he thought and it had picked up a round. When he pulled the trigger he fired a round right in the end of a demolition pack. That has been known to set off demolitions, but it didn't, Thank God, or about five of us would have been killed. As it was nobody was hurt and Pegg got one good ass chewing! We all knew where we were going, but we were looking forward to getting off that ship. It rained every day and night and trying to sleep in that LCT (without a cover) was just like trying to sleep in a bathtub with the water running.

Iwo Jima: As I recall we woke up at about 0300 or 0400 several miles from Iwo, but someone said go up on deck and look. You could see continual gunfire onto Iwo. There was the biggest concentration of warships that the Navy ever had put together in the Pacific. They were all firing except the troop transports like we were on. I can tell you it was something to behold.

I expect it was about 0500 when they called us to breakfast. We had steak and eggs. I guess that was the least they could do for us, and it was to be the last meal for a good many of those that hit the beach a little later. After we ate, we went topside and watched the fireworks, and what a show it was. Battlewagons and Cruisers were firing broadside over the smaller ships that were running in fast and firing at any target they could find. They also had LST's with large flat decks that had rocker launchers almost covering the deck, and each rack held 10 or 20 thirty-pound rockets, and they would run in close and in a matter of a few minutes, fire every one of them. Probably 500 or 1,000 or maybe more, I don't know. But because these ships had to get in pretty close, Jap

artillery was hitting some of them. Anyway it was quite a sight, and we decided that there wasn't going to be anything left for us. Wrong again!

We watched dive-bombers bombing and strafing any emplacements they could pick up and once in awhile you could see a plane get hit with anti-aircraft fire. All in all, it was a hell of a mess we were headed for! I don't know what time it was when we gathered up our combat gear and went below inside the LST and loaded up into our assigned amtracks. Amtracks are a personnel carrier that covered the driver up front and a machine gun on top. The troops rode behind him, and there was a ramp in the back that dropped down when you got ashore. The top was not covered and we could watch everything that was going on.

When the word was passed the big doors on the LST opened up and the ramp dropped down and we were on our way! All of the amtracks pulled out of the LST and headed out in a single line for a little way and then got in circles. There were a good many circles of amtracks, with about ten amtracks to the circle. We were between the beach and the battleship New York, and every time the New York fired a broadside of those 16-inch guns, our amtrack would shake like a dog from the concussion.

Finally when all the amtracks were unloaded and circling, the word was given and we all strung out in a straight line parallel to the beach and headed in. I was kind of glad to get away from that battleship before it shook us to pieces. We began to draw some fire before we ever got to the beach, but not too bad and none was too close. I did see a fighter plane get hit to our left toward Mt. Suribachi. He was about 2,000 feet high when I saw him and he headed straight down with all guns firing until he hit the ocean!

We hit the beach at 0900 and our amtrack did not go ashore, instead he just swung parallel with it and dropped the ramp to unload. Just as he dropped the ramp someone yelled "Belt get that machine gun (the one on the amtrack)," I turned and looked at the gun and thought "here I am carrying 2 20-pound packs of explosives, 2 canteens of water, first aid kit, entrenching tool, knife, bayonet, 45 pistol and its ammo, rifle and 500 rounds of ammo, detonators for the explosives, steel helmet and a transport pack on back and someone wants me to grab a machine gun, too, and jump out into the ocean!" I decided not to take the machine gun.

I jumped out of the amtrack and landed in water up to my armpits and had a hell of a time getting enough traction to get ashore, but get ashore I did and found a bomb carter just in from the water and jumped into it. I looked up to see that there were three rises just off the beach and probably 20 or 30 feet apart that had been caused by the ocean. I took cover behind them. Then I noticed that the Japs were dropping mortars about every 10 feet right down those rises and doing a lot of damage. They already had those rises zeroed in and they were playing hell with anyone who took cover behind them. The only break we had was that the volcanic ash was loose and the mortars were burying themselves before going off. I saw one land between two guys who were about 4 feet apart and they were both hit, but crawled off. The next thing I knew part of a guy's leg bone and foot landed in the carter with me and I decided it was time for me to get off that beach, and I was not planning on stopping at any of those rises! A little way past that last rise we found a Jap 77 field-piece back in a cave and I yelled for Pegg and his flamethrower. He came up and I told him we had to knock it out. It was firing canister shot parallel with the beach at whom I believe were the 23<sup>rd</sup> Marines. They were firing

one about every minute or maybe one every half-minute. Anyway, every time they fired you could see a path of men taken out of those landing on the beach. Pegg started toward the cave turning on his flamethrower, crouched on one knee and emptied it into the cave. It looked like he did a complete enough job that I didn't even use my demolitions. I wished later that I had. I got tired of carrying them and besides they kept swinging between my legs and bothering me before I got a chance to use them.

I started to go in the cave to check it out and I stopped short when I noticed a trip wire about 6 inches off the ground and about four inches in front of my legs. The wire was tied to detonators of a 180-pound bell anti-tank mine on each side of the cave. If I had tripped that wire it would have vaporized me. I backed off a few steps and headed up a little ditch, when someone yelled "watch that booby trap!" I looked down just in time to see a small percussion grenade go off between my feet. Why I didn't get some of that stuff in my legs or eyes I'll never know, unless it was because it was half-buried in that soft volcanic ash.

We kept moving in toward the #1 airfield, and there were mortars, shell fire, machine gun fire, and rifle fire everywhere, but we just kept on moving. After the war the people who wrote books about Iwo always said the Japs let the first few waves in before they started shelling the beach. Well, I'm here to tell you that the shelling starting before we hit the beach. Maybe it intensified after the first waves were in, but there was plenty of it when we hit the beach, and I was in the first wave! Quinn told me later that he was in a crater when Klobutcher jumped in with him and said "I think someone was shooting at me."

Now this may be hard to believe and understand, but after the first few minutes ashore you didn't pay any attention to the rifle fire. I guess it was because of the mortars and shellfire. You tried to get away from it, but the only way you could was to get in a crater and hope that none of them would come in with you. After you were there for a minute, to catch your breath, you would take off and advance until you found another crater big enough to give you a little cover, and in you would go for a minute till you caught your breath. One time on the beach I saw a fighter hit and the pilot bail out; unfortunately the little breeze that we had carried him right into Jap territory.

Before we landed we were told there was no water on the island and to take care of the two canteens in our possession. I swear my mouth and throat were so dry I took a drink about every time I stopped and was scared I would use all my water the first day, but I wasn't using nearly as much as I thought. About three days later I still had a canteen and a half left.

My company was to cut across the island and swing right, north along the #1 airfield, so advance we did. The only problem was most of our company was held up somewhere between the beach and the airfield and some of us did not know this. We advanced to the west edge of the airfield and started north. My God! I never saw so much shellfire. We were catching it from the Japs to the north and south of where we were and also from our own navy from the east and west of us since they thought everyone was held up back on the beach. I ran between a wounded Marine (who I think was Lenear) and another wounded Marine who was being treated by a corpsman. The wounded Marine was John Basilone (Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal). There was

nothing I could do since a corpsman was working on him, so I kept on going until I found a bomb crater.

I saw a guy ahead of me jump up and head toward another crater, when one of our navy shells went off over his head and down he went. I thought he was done for, but after a few seconds he began to move and crawled into a crater. Another shell landed right in front of me, so I took off and ran up and fell into the same hole. He was looking at his helmet, which had a BIG dent in it. I left him sitting there shaking his head and looking at his helmet, with one BIG headache. The shell and mortar fire was so intense we had to move. We ran through a bunch of wrecked Jap airplanes and found ourselves a HUGE bomb crater, about 15 or 20 feet across, and that is where we holed up for awhile to let the rest of the company catch up. There were about 15 of us up there and most were from our company.

I looked down my rifle barrel and it was dirty as hell, so I proceeded to get out my string and pull a rag through it when someone yelled “targets!” I thought “oh, hell” and put a clip in, held it over my head and fired one round to clean it and lay down along the rim of the crater to begin shooting at the Japs the Marines on the beach were beginning to drive across the airfield. Every once in awhile a Jap would go down, and in a few seconds you’d see him blow himself up with a hand grenade.

Once we saw, down on the side of the airfield and straight in front of us, a Jap run out of a gun emplacement for about 50 yards and pick up another Jap and start back to the gun emplacement. Needless to say we all opened up on him. He made it back, but I would say he had been hit. You couldn’t really be sure though, as he was about 700 yards from where we were firing. At that time we were getting worried about not seeing

any friendly troops, and I was also pretty leery of all those wrecked airplanes behind us. No telling how many snipers were in them.

I don't know how long we were up there when Pegg, who was about 30 yards away in another hole, yelled out he was hit. I went to the side of the crater he was on and yelled to him asking where he was. He held up his rifle so I could see where he was and I tore out of that crater and headed his way. I was running right along the edge of the airfield, which was built up quite a way (it must have dropped off 30 feet); anyway as I was running to where Pegg was, some Jap must have had the range on me because I could see machine gun bullets hitting about a foot below me all the way until I reached Pegg.

I jumped into the hole with Pegg and told him I would put a field dressing on his wound, but he had already done so. I don't know what hit him as it went through his leg without breaking it. He told me later it went through the bone but didn't break it, so it must have been an armor piercing 30-caliber.

We landed at 0900 and were up on that ever-loving airfield inside of an hour. When we didn't see anyone by the afternoon I sent Pegg and McDowell, both wounded in the leg, back toward the beach. I told them to find an officer and tell them where we were to get the naval gunfire stopped, and find out what the hell was going on since we hadn't seen any of our troops up there.

As it ended we didn't see any of our company until about 1730, 6 June 1944 ("D" day). We finally found what was left of our company and moved to our left a little before starting forward. We didn't get very far when we were told to reorganize and dig in for

the night. I heard there were about 75 men left of our company of 200 at the end of “D” day.

It was dark when a tank moved up in our company area and I learned one of my first lessons on Iwo: “Stay away from the tanks!” They draw shellfire like a magnet. We lost some more men that night from the Japs firing at the tanks. That night was a humdinger. Our mortars and ships on both sides of the island tired to keep parachute flares going above us all the time so we wouldn’t get any “surprises” from the Japs. I can tell you when there were no flares going it got dark and intense!

We moved out the next morning early under mortars and shellfire. The first thing we saw was a Marine on a stretcher with a rifle stuck in the ground beside him, plasma going into him and he was throwing it up. He was not going to make it. The next 3 or 4 days were spent moving up, finding cover, moving, finding cover, time and time again. We would try to time the mortar and shellfire and move when they were the lightest; clinch your teeth, go and hope for the best.

So far out of our 12-man squad McGrew was killed on the beach, Murphy had a shell splinter take off a finger in the middle of his hand, Quinn was hit and sent back, McKay (who was older than the rest of us) had to be sent back after he saw a guy close to him on a stretcher get hit with a mortar. McKay went out of his head. Nogren was wounded and Nurcyk was gone; I don’t know what happened to either of them. Anyway, about half of our assault squad was gone.

The rest of our time on that island was about the same: move up, find cover, move up, find cover, dig in for the night, call for more flares during the night, call for a corpsman, try to hook up with the men on your right and left flanks, knock out a cave,



watch for snipers, move out, dig in, etc. There was no end to it. The only thing that island was good for in peacetime was the sulphur the Japs had mined there.

Consequently, in a lot a places we dug in for night defense the ground was so hot you couldn't stand it. You would have to move every little bit to keep your hide from burning. Just a little bit more of hell.

One night we were digging in when we heard a voice yell, "Hey, you Marines!" Now when you hear something like that you could almost bet it was an English speaking Jap trying to get you to expose yourself so they could get a shot at you, but this time it wasn't. There had been a company up there about three days before and got pushed back. They apparently did not know that a corpsman had three or four wounded in a cave treating them, and in the process of things, left them behind. Well, after we got the corpsman to show himself, we got a tank to cover for some help to get the casualties back to the rear so they could get better treatment. That same night we had some Japs behind our lines trying to find our C.P. (Command Post), and a couple of them ran right by my foxhole. After they went by you couldn't see them because there were no flares up at the time.

One day we were moving up under spasmodic rifle and mortar fire. I moved up and to my left and back when I saw a cave. I unloaded a hand-grenade into the cave; then I saw someone lying on his back on a ridge of dirt. I went back and gathered him up in my arms when I heard him take his last breath. It was Cardin from machine guns. I laid him back down and yelled for a corpsman to check him out. Then I crawled back a few feet and looked to the rear and down when I saw a Jap sniping at guys on my right flank. I put him out of commission. Right beside him was what looked like a big oven, and the

hole in it was almost big enough for a man to stand up in, and the hole had a big round rock in front of it. About that time I saw another Jap inside the hole, and I let him have a round and watched for a few seconds, didn't see anything else, so moved on with the rest of the company.

One day we were in a big jumble of rocks, catching mortar and rifle fire, and they passed the word to move off to our right flank, which we did. Then we came to an open area that was about 75 yards across. Well, the mortars and rifles were not causing us too much concern, so we started across that open area single file and spread out pretty well. We were doing pretty well until the first man lifted his foot to climb up the rocks on that side. They shot him dead and all hell broke loose with rifle, mortar and machine gun fire. I was out in the open and the only cover I could see then was a ditch about four inches deep. I got in that ditch and began to squirm to get a little deeper. I was still squirming when I heard this mortar coming. It hit a few yards away and did no damage, but I knew damned good and well that there were going to be some more. About that time I heard it coming, it was hissing and I knew it was going to be close, and close it was! I wager it was not two feet from my head. It blew me clear out of my little ditch and blew the rifle out of my hands. I couldn't see anything, but felt around till I found my rifle; then I got to my feet and started running till I found a crater with three other guys in it. After a minute or two we decided heavy fire or not, we had better haul ass and haul ass we did! Well we made it across the open ground then started back to the rear and after a little ways we slowed to a fast walk. I found myself walking with three or four other guys when we came to a crater and for some reason I cut away from them. I walked on one side of the crater, and about the time we got even with the center of the crater a shell

landed right in the middle of them. Killed all of them and the sad part of that was it was one of our shells. No farther apart than we were, I don't know how I kept from getting some of it myself. In that little excursion, our Company Executive, Lt. Manshine was killed. Lane had a plastic cigarette case torn out of his pocket and someone else started to get a drink and had a hole in his canteen. We lost several men, I don't know how many or who they were.

The first time we got relieved off the front lines, Lt. Manshine watched my platoon come into the bivouac area and when I got up to him he stopped me and asked if I had a machine gun platoon. I told him no, that I was just "making do" and he told me to split those B.A.R.'s up with the rest of the company. Some of my men were glad to get rid of them as they were a lot heavier than an M-1 rifle and they also didn't relish being a priority target. I really couldn't blame them, but I didn't like seeing those B.A.R.'s not being used.

One time we were moving through an area that had a sniper working and we could not locate him. Me and a couple of other guys were in a crater and I talked Quinn into putting his helmet on a little stick and holding it up so we could tell where he was firing from. Well, in the process of doing that he got a little more exposed than he really wanted to and damned near got his head shot off. I tried to get him to do it again and he said "to hell with you, if you think it's such a good idea, you do it!" As serious as thing were, we did see a little humor in it.

After someone did the sniper in, we moved through the area he was covering and discovered that his main targets were the B.A.R.'s (Browning Automatic Rifle – light

machine gun) men, so every time we ran across a dead B.A.R. man, I picked up his B.A.R. and gave it to one of my men. There were several of them.

The Japs sprang a new weapon on us on Iwo. It was a ground-fired rocket. I heard later that it was a 360 m.m. rocket. About every evening at 1900 they would fire one of those things. You could set your watch by them. When we first saw them go over they were high and looked like two 55-gallon drums welded together. They didn't look like they were going fast at all, but were they BIG! They always fired them from the north end of the island and I heard that several of the first one they fired missed the whole island. I guess they had a little trouble getting them down, and they would go right over Mt. Suribachi and into the ocean, which suited us just fine. When we got up toward the north end of the island we could hear them fire those things. It sounded like metal against metal screeching. I guess they had metal launch rails and they laid them on and then fired them. anyway, we could hear them and they finally got so they could hit the south end of the island. I saw one of those rockets sticking in the ground and only part of it had exploded. There were pieces of shrapnel as big as your arm lying around, and close by was someone lying face down between his own legs. I don't know what hit him, but it must've broken everything in his middle when it hit. I doubt if he felt a thing.

One day as we were moving up under light mortar and machine gun fire, we were spotted and the Japs started firing everything they had. I picked a foxhole dug by a small Jap and went in. It was a wonder they hadn't booby-trapped it; they did do that sort of thing. Anyway, by doubling up pretty tight I could get myself in it deep enough to get my head below the ground level, which is where I wanted to be since they were firing a lot of mortars and shellfire all around us. As I was sitting there wondering what my next

move would be I heard this piece of shrapnel coming. I came straight down and went right past the edge of my helmet, between my knees, past my ankles and buried itself in the dirt! I had to see what it was so I stuck my finger down under it and pried it out. I was about the size of a penny matchbox, jagged all over and hot as hell (burnt my finger good)! I decided then and there if it was your time to catch one of these things, it would find you not matter where you were.

I think that was the day we were around airfield #2, or it may have been the north end of airfield #1. I have no way of knowing for sure the way the shelling had everything torn up it was a little hard to tell just *where* you were. Anyway, there were some wrecked airplanes lying there and I made a beeline for one of those planes and slid in under its wing. I don't know what possessed me, I suppose my nerves were going or I was getting a little rock-happy or something and thought I was pretty safe from those mortars as long as I was under that wing.

I broke off a piece of TNT out of my pack of explosives and lit it. It burns well and is very hot. I poured some water in my canteen cup and proceeded to heat it. About that time another guy thought that was a pretty good place to be and slid in under that wing about six feet from me. He looked at me and asked what the hell I was doing. I told him I was making a cup of coffee. He looked at me like I was crazy and said "well for #\$\*@%\$&\* Sake!" About that time a mortar landed on top of the wing, went off and he left me. Hell I thought that was a pretty good place to be for a little while, so I finished my coffee.

Shortly after I left that airplane I was running over some pretty rough ground and hid behind a pile of dirt. There lay a dead Jap right in front of my head an just a few feet

to my right was a bunker he apparently came out from. I watched the bunker for a couple of minutes and decided one of our shells had hit right in front of it, knocking it out of commission. I then turned my attention to the dead Jap. He was lying on his back with his right arm up across his chest and he had a hand grenade in his hand. In his left breast pocket was what looked like a billfold and I thought it would make a pretty good souvenir, but there was this hand grenade that could be a booby-trap. I took my rifle and put it against his elbow, got down behind the dirt and shoved. Nothing happened and his arm didn't move either, so I took out my pocket knife, reached over the dirt and cut the bottom out of his pocket, pulling out the billfold (which I still have). I figured I might as well have it since he wasn't going to need it.

The Japs knew the Marines were great souvenir hunter, so they started booby-trapping their dead leaving a good souvenir as bait. Usually a pressure-release type of booby trap that went off when the body was rolled over on it. The Marines learned about this pretty quickly and so would carry a piece of rope they could tie onto the dead Jap, jump in the nearest hole and pull. If it didn't go off, it was safe. So then the Japs started booby-trapping any hole closest to their souvenir-carrying dead. Marines started leaving those souvenirs for someone else.

One day, about D plus 18, we were moving up under the usual mortar and machine gun fire when it happened that four or five of us had to hit a little ditch the Japs had dug for something and had thrown dirt out in the direction we were going. This ditch wasn't six inches deep, but it was better than lying out on the level ground. Well, about the time I hit that ditch I heard this Jap 77 (about a 3 inch shell of high explosive) go right over my head. A few seconds later another one went over. I swear it couldn't be but

inches over my head, so I squirmed another inch deeper in that ditch when another one went over! I could hear those damned things exploding about half a second after they went over and I knew they were awfully close. If they dropped that 77 gun-barrel down at all it was going to hit the dirt right in front of my head, so I decided when the next one went over, this little old country boy was going to move his rear end out of there! Another one went over and out of there I came, running for the first cover I could find, which was a bomb crater about 10 feet across. Just as I made the edge of it I heard one or two of the four or five guys already in it yell “look out for that mine!” Sure enough, there was a mine lying uncovered, inside the crater. I did manage to miss the mine and about the time I got to the crater I heard that Jap 77 explode right in front of where I had been.

On my way from the ditch to the crater I saw something that later I could not believe. There was a combat photographer out there walking around with a camera in his hand looking for a picture to take. I don't know what he was thinking about, and I don't know what happened to him because the next time I raised my head above the edge of that crater he was gone. He couldn't have been more than ten or fifteen feet from where that shell went off, but I wouldn't give a dime for his chances out there.

I am here to tell you that ALL the time we were on that island the mortars were falling and the rifle and machine gun fire was going on. Sure, sometimes it would lighten up, such as at night, but even then you never knew when some of it was going to come in. At night there were flares in the sky almost continually, and when there weren't any flares things got tense. If there was no light for awhile you would get to hearing and seeing things that weren't there and it only took a minute and someone was calling back to the company command post to find out why. Then, of course, when those parachute

flares did come, they would swing back and forth and every shadow on the ground would move. God it was nerve-racking!

And then there were those land crabs. At night you would be in your foxhole watching by flare-light, trying to catch any Japs trying to infiltrate through our lines. You would strain your eyes till they were about to drop out of your head and not see anything for sure, but you could hear something moving across dry stuff and getting closer and closer. About that time a land crab would fall into the hole with you. I don't know how in thunder they lived through all that bombardment the Navy put in there before we landed, but they did!

One day we were pushing up as fast as we could and maybe it was a little too fast. The first thing I knew we lost contact with the people on both flanks. We had a short distance to go across level ground, then there was a big pile of dirt. On both flanks were big piles of just plain rough terrain, maybe 15 feet high. The whole platoon was up there with me and I thought "Oh, crap! We don't have any cover fire from either flank!" About that time I looked back and it seemed like some Marine was aiming his rifle right at my head. I thought, "what the hell is he doing?" but he didn't fire, just kept on aiming, so I turned to see what he was aiming at just in time to see a Jap duck his head down behind the pile of dirt in front of us. About 5 seconds later a knee mortar hit pretty close and I knew where it had come from, and that there would be more. I yelled for the platoon to get back to where we had come from, where we had some cover. I moved a little to my right flank to see if I could give some covering fire if they needed it. I looked back where we had just come from in time to see the Marine who had previous pointed his rifle over my head, crouched down trying to get a bead on something off to our right



flank. He saw me and yelled there was a machine gun over there. I got down on one knee and looked to see if I could find it, when another mortar came in pretty close.

About then that machine gun cut loose and I never was able to locate it, but decided I better pull back for cover. That Jap machine-gunner took a crack at me when I went across his fire-lane, but missed. When I got back to cover I found out what he was firing at the first time. After telling my platoon to get back to cover and turning my back on

them, they had  
few seconds. When  
close, they all took  
the machine gun cut  
man killed and  
that point a lot of  
and were just not  
them had not been  
months and it made



apparently bunched up for a  
the mortar went off so  
off at once and that's when  
loose. End result was one  
about 8 or 10 wounded. At  
them were replacements  
trained enough. Some of  
in the Corps but a few  
a world of difference.

After they went across, the machine gun cut loose and that left me by myself with a machine gun on one side of me and a bunch of Japs up in front, behind a pile of dirt, with a mortar. I knew they were taking aim on me and my only salvation was to get back across, in front of that machine gun. I moved back a few steps, but was still out of sight. I took another look toward where the mortar was and yelled for the guy on the other side to give me some cover, which he did. When he got up on one knee and aimed down where the machine gun was, I took off as fast as I could and made it across while the

machine-gunner was trying to find where the bullets were coming from. By the time they saw me go across, it was too late for them to swing on me

After I got back, I spread the platoon out and made contact with companies on both flanks and dug in. We were expecting a banzai attack. As a matter of fact, we were expecting one about every night we were on that island, but very few attempts were made. They were all half-hearted and made up of wounded Japs who were going to die anyway. We found out after the battle was won the reason we didn't get any banzai attacks was they had one smart commanding officer.

General Kuribayashi was the commanding officer at Iwo. He had several high-ranking officers under him and at least one of them may have been Samaji Inouye. Inouye strongly believed in the Banazi charge, where they gathered all the people they could muster, especially the wounded, got them drunk on Sake and then they would all attack at once; armed with hand grenades, explosive, pistols, bayonets, mines and sometimes even sharp sticks, depending on how drunk they were. They fought till they all died, for they were dying for their Emperor, which for some reason made them happy.

General Kuribayashi told his troops there were not going to be any banzai charges; that they were going to stay alive and every man was to take 10 Marines to their deaths. It was beginning to look like they were going to do just that! As General Erskine, U.S.M.C. said at the dedication of the Third Division Cemetery, "Victory was never in doubt . . . its cost was! What was in doubt in all our minds was whether there would be any of us left to dedicate our cemetery at the end, or whether the last Marine would die knocking out the last gun and gunner."

One night I had my platoon in a kind of gully. We were hooked up to C Company on our right and another platoon of our company on our left. I picked a high spot on the left part of the gully and put a machine gun up there where they could see quite a bit of the ground in front of us, in case we got an attack in the middle of the night. Things were fairly quiet with an occasional shell or mortar falling close and rifle fire all night, just to be sure nobody was asleep.

A little while after dark three of our artillery shells came ripping up this gully and I thought, "My God those shells didn't sound very high." I waited a few minutes and sure enough three more came through. The guys on the machine gun hollered down that the shellfire was too close. I got on the phone and called our company command post and told our Captain to have those guys knock off firing up that gully. He told me he didn't know of anyone firing in that area. I told him he had better find out who it was because if they moved their round any to the left they were going to knock out my machine gun. He was still trying to find out who it was when they did move it to the left and the next three shells hit just below my machine gun and blew those two guys right out and down in the middle of my platoon command post. Luckily, neither of them was hurt but it was awhile before we got the shells stopped and were able to get those two men back on the machine gun. While we were digging in that night, we dug up some Jap sea bags they had buried. I got a Jap flag out of one of them, which I still have.

We finally got relieved off the front line by some new replacements. We thought "hot dog we get out of that hell for awhile, get some good food and some rest!" Now THAT was a laugh. We were still getting shellfire every once in awhile, still getting shot at by snipers if we stuck our heads up and I could not get any rest. I had to take the "C"

rations away from the replacements and empty it all in a helmet and heat it so we ALL could have some. I don't know where all the chow went, but we sure didn't get very much of it. It didn't bother me too much though, as I didn't eat very much all the time we were on the island. The corpsman scared the hell out of me before we landed by telling us we didn't want to get shot because it was a hell of a mess and could turn into gangrene pretty fast. About all I ate while we were on the island were "D" bars, which were tropical chocolate that wouldn't melt and had 600 calories in them. I liked them pretty well, so I stuck with them. I thought they would be better in case I did get gut shot.

I recall one day I was hunkered down behind a pile of dirt waiting out a barrage of shellfire and mortars; the mortars could get you in a place like that, but you were pretty safe from the shells. I broke out a "D" bar and was trying to eat it when I got to shooing flies off it every time I took a bite. I got to wondering where they were coming from so I raised up on one elbow and looked around and there a few feet away was a dead Jap. It looked to me like those flies were either coming out of his nose or his mouth, so I saved the rest of the "D" bar for dessert later on. I weighed 160 pounds when we landed, but from lack of good food and no sleep, the first time I weighed after I got hit I was down to 129 pounds, but I was alive. I also doubt that I got more than about 7 hours sleep during the 23 days I was on the island, and that was just a few minutes at a time. I had no desire to wake up and see a Jap with a knife against my throat.

One night we set up for night defense in a rough terrain. You really couldn't see very far and we were catching shellfire every once in awhile, but making out ok. Later they passed the word that we were getting some rations that weren't "K" rations. There

was no way to get them without getting your butt shot off, so they threw them from one foxhole to the next. Castaneda and I were in the last foxhole and finally got some of those dry rations. In it were some crackers and canned butter and canned jelly. We opened the butter and jelly and were in the process of buttering the crackers when the Japs put a shell almost in the hole with us. Nobody was hurt but it filled those cans of butter and jelly full of very dirty dirt. I could have cried!

That night me and Castaneda took turns on watch. One time when I was on watch with the phone propped on my shoulder and against my ear, I went to sleep. I kept hearing this voice say "Belt . . . Belt . . . Belt!" Finally I came to and this replacement Lieutenant was on the phone from company. When I answered him he told me I had better take a walk around the park and he proceeded to talk me through the night. God! It was hard! Sometimes we could get a little medical brandy and take a sip. It would burn like molten lead all the way down, but wouldn't last long.

The next morning I overheard Lieutenant Jones of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon on the phone giving the mortars the range on the Jap gun that had screwed up our chow. They would fire one and then he would say "a little left" or "a little right". About the third or fourth time they fired they said, "How's that, Jonsie?" I heard Beatty reply, "never mind, he's dead." The sniper had spotted him.

That morning the captain told us we were going to be relieved. We waited all morning for another company to come in and take our place. I don't remember what time it was, but my machine gun crew yelled at me to come over to them, which I did as quick as I could. They had a guy who was wounded in the right side of his head, just above the ear, and it was deep enough that you could see a little of his brain. I asked the crew

where he had come from and they said he must have been crawling because they didn't see him until he poked his head above the dirt in front of them. When they realized he was one of us they reached over and dragged him into their foxhole, yelling for me to come over. I asked him who he was and where he came from (he came from in front of our lines, which probably accounted for his being wounded), but all I got was babbling. I got the captain on the phone and told him about this guy. He told me to roll him over and look at the rank and unit number on his back, which I did. I saw he was a lieutenant and told the captain. "Oh hell!" said the captain, "that was the guy in charge of your relief!" I thought "Oh, fine, now how the hell am I going to get my men off this lousy line when my relief is shot up?" We got some stretcher-bearers and they took off with him. I don't know how far they got, but suppose they made it. I hope so.

For most of that day we played the waiting game, hoping for relief and trying to stay out of the way of shells, mortars and snipers. Outside of that, we were pretty well stuck where we were, waiting for our relief. Sometime later that afternoon the captain called on the radio that our relief was on our right flank and to begin working my men out of there. I had my extreme right flank start moving to their right and back. When it got down to us, I sent the machine gun crew and Castaneda and I followed, bringing up the rear. We drew quite a bit of fire getting out of there, but made it without losing anyone.

When I reached the captain his left arm was torn all to hell and he was bleeding pretty badly. The corpsmen and noncoms were trying to get him to leave, but he wouldn't until all the company was out. He asked me if there was anyone else up there and I told him I was the last one, so he let them put him in a Jeep and send him back to

first aid. I don't know what hit him, but it must have been a piece of shrapnel. I never saw him again after that.

On the way back to the rear, Beatty got hit with a shell fragment that went through his left leg, into his left testicle. After that he was known as "One-ball Beatty." Colonel Shepherd was on his way back when the Japs put a shell right in his Jeep, killing him and two others.

The Japs had built cisterns to hold the water on the island, but the Naval gunfire cracked almost all of them, so all the water we had we were carrying in our two canteens. After so a long a time the Navy got to distilling water and sending it up to us in gas cans. It tasted like gas, but it was wet. Because there was no natural water on the island we didn't get to wash or change clothes. Boy, we must have smelled great! But then everyone smelled the same, so no big deal there, and we had a lot more worries than that.

On 11 March (D + 21) we spent the entire night under heavy shell and mortar fire, plus all kinds of rifle fire. We were pretty well dug in and just stayed down except to take a look every little bit to be sure they weren't going to attack. Out in front of us about thirty yards was one of our tanks that had been knocked out. All night long we were taking pot shots at Japs who were crawling around on that tank, when we could see them. I don't know what they were looking for, unless it was water. I was afraid the turret might still work and they might figure out how to turn that machine gun and the 75 MM canon on us, but it didn't happen. I don't know if we did any damage to them that night or not; you really couldn't see very well.

The next morning the only thing that happened was it got just that much worse. They knew we would be moving out, and were determined not to let any of us out of

there. They were throwing everything at us. As I recall we were due to move at 0800 but before that time a captain (I don't remember which one, we had about a half dozen either killed or wounded and replaced) called me on the radio and said Canoy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon was in trouble on my left flank and being held up by a machine gun. He asked if I could help him in any way.

I told the captain if I moved either to my right or left I was going to lose half my platoon, as it was raining mortar rounds in our position. I planned to move them out forward to get out of that mortar fire and then maybe I could work left and help Canoy out. I was having a hell of a time keeping my own platoon alive. We did not have a flamethrower or any demolitions. I was getting my platoon ready to move out, so told him he should see if he could get help from his left flank. The way things were stacking up, I could have lost most of my platoon had I moved them out to my left.

Well, time rolled around to move out and we were catching hell in general. I figured it wouldn't be any worse up close to the Japs and all scattered out than it was all holed up in one place getting the hell shelled out of us. So come time to move I started them out two and three at a time, with the rest of us giving cover fire. As soon as the first ones found cover, I hit a replacement in the ass and said, "Go Witcher" and watched him take off and run about thirty yards, jumping into a hole. As soon as he hit the bottom of the hole, he jumped right straight up and ran another ten yards to his right. Later in the day I found myself in a hole with him and asked why he had come out of that hole so quickly. He told me there was a Jap covered up and asleep in the hole. I couldn't believe it. I asked him why, since he was on top of the guy, he didn't kill him. He said it scared him too badly.



The next man I sent was an old original company man by the name of Heines. I was lying there with my rifle trying to give cover fire and told him to go. Nothing happened and after a few seconds I looked around and told him to "GO!" He began to shake like a leaf, tears began to run down his face and he looked at me and said, "I can't." I called a corpsman and had him tagged "combat fatigue" and sent him back. He had just got his fill of waiting to be killed any second and cracked. I knew he was not going to be any help to us and the best place for him was as far back as I could get him. I really felt sorry for him.

I was next, so after the next shell landed, away I went. When I caught up with them, I kept right on moving until we came to a drop off about thirty feet. I told them all to dig in and let the rest of the troops catch up with us. I sent a couple of men to our left flank to see if they could find the machine gun holding Canoy up. Someone must have found it because the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon did finally catch up and straightened out our lines.

As soon as I could, I moved along the edge of that drop off, checking on people, ammunition and making sure there were two guys to a hole and that one of them WOULD be awake at all times that night. All of a sudden someone saw a Jap down below us trying to make it to safety. He didn't. He probably got hit with a pound of M-1 slugs. That night was something else. Every once in awhile the Japs would fire a bunch of mortars right in our area; they knew exactly where we were. Then they starting firing part of them with delayed fuses. We would wait out one of those barrages; then when we thought it was safe to take a look, one of those mortars with a delayed fuse would go off.

That was bad enough. Then some of our own mortars began to fall in our area. I got on the phone to company command post and told the captain to have those mortars

“knock it off!” Well after a kind of heated discussion and him telling me about three times that those were not our mortars, I told him I would bring some fins off those mortars to show him they were ours. About that time one of them landed in my machine gun nest on my left flank. I don’t remember of any of them being killed, but two of them were pretty badly hurt and all three had to be sent back, leaving my machine gun out of commission. I didn’t waste any time telling that captain about it.

Things settled down in the wee hours of the morning until I head BAM! BAM! BAM! come from my line about thirty feet in front of my command post and I thought, “here it comes!” I heard these two guys yelling back and forth and finally I could see them move in the flare light. I asked them what the hell was going on. They said they had it taken care of and things settled down again. Next day I found out that one of them was asleep at the bottom of the foxhole and the other guy had leaned his rifle in one end of the foxhole and watched till he got tired and sat down on the other end of the hole, away from his rifle.

That was all right for a while, until a Jap on his hands and knees right above him said something to him. He told me the next day he didn’t know what to do so he just mumbled something under his breath and when the Jap started to repeat himself he jumped for his rifle, swing and BAM! BAM! BAM! and jumped out of the foxhole. The wounded Jap fell in the hole on top of the guy who was asleep. We as you might imagine, he woke up and wanted to be ANY place but there, so managed to get out from under the Jap and out of that hole. Then the two Marines threw a hand grenade in with the Jap, just to make sure. After that they weren’t going to dig another foxhole, so they dragged him out of their hole, and settled down for the night, but did not go back to sleep

again. They got a beautiful Beretta off him. As near as we could figure, he either wanted to surrender or was lost, or was trying to get some water. There was a cistern in the area, which the naval gunfire had cracked, as they had done to all the cisterns. The Japs were really hurting for water.

At daybreak we were looking at a big circular drop off that made a natural amphitheater; a huge one. We could see the ocean past the north end of the island; that's how close we were to having it over with. The only good thing about being that far was we had overrun most of the Jap artillery and what was left was pretty short range to be firing big guns in, so what they lacked in artillery they made up with mortars and machine guns.

The evening before we had an observation plane flying around just out in front of our lines. I suppose they were marking our front lines for the big guns back in the rear area. I watched and all of a sudden the right wing just folded over on top of the plane and down it came, from about 200 feet. It was about 500 yards out in front of us and we all kept watching for some movement around the plane, but never saw any. While we were watching, the captain called on the radio and asked if I could see the plane. I told him I could and he told me to have my machine gun open fire on it. I could not believe my ears, so I called back and asked him if they couldn't get a tank to go down there and check I out (which would have been pretty foolish, I have to admit). I didn't want to open fire on the plane when there may have been someone alive in it (which I really doubted), but I still didn't want to be the one to fire on it. I talked to the captain long enough that someone else opened up on it. I suppose as close to dark as it was they

didn't want them captured and they wanted to fire the plane so no information would get to the Japs.

The morning of 13 March we were supposed to ALL go down over that drop off at once. Time came to go and nobody moved. They did the same thing every hour all morning long. By that time everyone was so sick of killing, being shot at, seeing their buddies killed that they must wanted to stop right there and let there be an end to it. During the morning I crawled on my belly clear to my left flank to see where we could get down off that drop off, if anyone ever made a move. The ground was rough as hell after all the shell fire and I ended up crawling between two piles of dirt and was watching to my left to see where the rest of the company was located when this Sherman tank came lumbering up. I didn't pay too much attention to it for a little bit, and I don't know where the hell he was headed unless he was figuring on falling off that drop off. All of a sudden he cut loose with his 30 caliber machine gun and I thought what the hell, and looked in the direction that the Japs would have to come from and saw these machine gun bullets hitting awful close. I twisted just a little more and could see the tracers going over both my ankles and clearing about ½ inch. I couldn't move or they would have shot both my feet off. I thought I would rather get shot in the arm than both ankles so I stuck my M1 rifle up in the air and waved it. Someone on the tank must have seen it because they quit firing. "Boy, was that close!" I guess the only thing they could see behind the dirt were my feet and they must not have known there were any Marines in the area, so they cut loose. It was getting pretty close to 1200 and the captain called me up on the radio and said, "Belt, would you take your platoon down over that drop off at 1300?" Now *that* I had to think about for a few seconds and told him I would, but that once I started I had

better have a lot of company. He assured me when I got my platoon started other companies would follow.

So at 1300 I told the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon “Lets go, we are going down!” and found a place right in front of that tank where we could get down, and started down. I don’t mind telling you I never looked back for fear of turning around and going right back where we had been.

All morning it had been awfully still, no mortars, no shells, no machine guns, and just a little rifle fire once in awhile. I don’t have to tell you what a relief it was, after 23 days of trying to stay alive. We were also pretty sure the first guys over that drop off were going to get themselves shot. I thought what the hell, maybe I can get one of those million dollar wounds and get the hell off this hell hole.” So down I went, waiting to get it any second. Another great fear was not knowing what was on the face-side of that cliff. We couldn’t see it from above.

The tank that had given me the bad time had moved into about the only slot you could walk down, so I moved along side of it and down to the bottom of that drop off. As soon as I got there I cut to my right, with teeth clinched, all the time watching the backside of that 30 or 40 foot bank, trying to see the Japs before they saw me. Didn’t see a blessed thing on the backside. Of course, they could have been biding their time. It was quiet, too quiet. There wasn’t any fire except an occasional rifle shot. I didn’t like it one bit;’ it was too quiet and I *knew* this battle was not over.

Well, I walked about 75 yards before turning around and the hair crawled on the back of my neck. There were only three guys behind me. My heart just about stopped. I told them to get in a bomb crater and stay put till I got back. I really didn’t expect to get

back, but back I started and made it to where we came down and started back up. Just as I got to the tank, they fired their 75 cannon right over the top of me and knocked me to the bottom again. Now I was *mad* before that, and now the steam was really coming out of my ears! I made it clear back the next tie and there stood my platoon (mostly replacements), and I told them I was going down one more time and if I had to come back for anybody, they wouldn't have to go to the bottom because I was going to shoot them on the spot!

I went down again and when I got to the bottom I checked to see if they were all there and they were, so I started back where I left the others. I often wondered what went through their minds during the time I was gone. I got the platoon strung out as far as I dared and noticed that some of the other companies were coming down. They didn't want to be the first to go down, and I can't blame them for that.

After I got the platoon scattered out I told them to move out. Nothing happened. I yelled again for them to move out but they were not about to! I told Corporal Castaneda (about the only man who wasn't a replacement) "I'm going to move out and if you have any trouble with any of them following me, shoot them." I made sure they all heard that.

At this point I want you to know that coming down the face of that drop off or getting out in front and leading that platoon had NOTHING to do with bravery ( a little gutsy, maybe), but it had nothing to do with bravery. I was just sick to death of living hour after hour waiting to be hit and was getting tired of it. Besides, I didn't know how else to get them to move. Leading them was really pretty stupid; a platoon leader should be just to the rear of his men so if they get into trouble he might help them. But I was

going to play hell helping them as long as I was out in front! But I was just a stinking corporal acting like a lieutenant, what did I know?

What happened next was bound to happen. I advanced about 75 yards and came to a little draw, still no shots being fired. I saw some steps cut in the dirt going down into the draw and figured they were probably mined when I noticed a hole in the ditch right at the bottom of the bank. I wondered what it was for; it was too little for someone to get through, and besides, if there had been someone in there they couldn't have had more than 15 feet field of fire, and *nobody* sets up a position like that. WRONG AGAIN! I was about 12 feet from that hole looking at it when my radioman came up behind me. I started to turn to see who it was but still had my eyes on that hole when I saw the dust fly around it. I went down like a ton of bricks, it seemed like it was just a few seconds but must have been somewhat longer when I came to and realized I was paralyzed completely on my left side. Then I noticed I was covered with blood and it was running out of my left sleeve about the size of a pencil. I realized it was MY blood and I yelled, "Corpsman!" as loud as I could. I bet they heard me at the other end of the island. I rolled over a little on my right side and saw my radioman, Jeffers (a replacement I had just gotten and hardly knew, standing up asking "Where's he at, Belt?" It was to be the last thing he ever said; the bullet hit him right between the eyes and he was dead when he hit the ground.

A corpsman showed up and slid my jacket off my left arm, sprinkled some sulfa on my arm, bandaged it up and told me someone would be up to get me, and started to leave. I asked him if he was going to fix my back and he told me there was nothing wrong with my back. I asked him if he would take a look. He put down his medical

packed, rolled me over and said “Oh My God!” Now that statement did not pump a whole lot of encouragement into me. I pictured a hole about the size of a dinner plate in my back, but it really wasn’t that big.

He worked on my back and side and packed up again. I asked him if it would be OK to start back. I *really* wanted to be somewhere else. He said, “Hell no!” that he had given me a shot of morphine and marked a “M” on my forehead so they wouldn’t give me another one too quickly. He told me the stretcher-bearers would be up to get me and shoved off.

Where I fell was behind some dirt, weeds and a little brush, and that sniper couldn’t see me, or the corpsman as long as we were pretty well down. But I was afraid they would charge and finish me off.

I was later to find out the bullet went through my arm, missing the bone but cutting an artery and the ulnar nerve, went in my side, tearing up two ribs and coming out about two inches to the left of my spine, tearing up two more ribs. It jarred my spine pretty good. That was why I was paralyzed on the left side, but I was so lucky it didn’t hit my lung. This was NOT the million-dollar wound. I classed it more like a two dollar and fifty cent one, but I was beginning to see my way off that island.

About that time Hines showed up (the guy that cracked up early in the morning the day before). He kept low and asked “where’s he at, Belt?” and I told him in the hole at the bottom of the ditch. He took what hand grenades I had left and went down in the ditch and started working on them. I guess there were several of them because I was told later he got seven of them before he ran into a machine gun and was killed. Now if you want to talk brave, THAT was brave. When he showed up he had no helmet, no pack, no



cartridge belt; only a carbine and a few grenades! But what he lacked in gear, he made up in nerve and was a good Marine!

I'll tell you about another good Marine. In our assault squad were two guys, Spicer and Hawkins, they were very good buddies. When they worked, they worked together and when they went on liberty, they went together. When you saw one, you saw the other. One day they were all pinned down in a crater and needed extra fire on a Jap position, and someone told Hawkins to try to make it back to company command post and get some more support. About the time he started out of the crater, Spicer grabbed his cartridge belt and pulled him back, saying, "I'll go", and charged out of that crater and was immediately killed. That was every bit as brave as falling on a hand grenade to save someone. He gave his life so a buddy could live.

Pretty quickly a couple of stretcher-bearers showed up and went through my pack and asked what I wanted to keep with me, and then put me on a stretcher. Then they stood there like a couple of big-assed birds telling each other how well I fit a stretcher! I didn't want to hear *that*; I wanted them to get me out of there! They got me back to the company command post where I told Leary what was going on up front. I kept begging for a drink of water, which they didn't want me to have because I had a chest wound. I guess they must have thought I might leak. Anyway, they finally gave me a little water and when I rolled over to get it I tore my back open again. Some days it just doesn't pay to get up.

The strapped me down in a Jeep with about four other guys and took off for the rear area. I didn't remember anything about that ride, thank God, it couldn't have been very pleasant. They took me back to division hospital and put me in a tent with a bunch

of other wounded and gave me plasma. All night long someone would come in the tent every once in awhile and feel everyone to see if they were still warm.

The next day sometime (I really wasn't with it for part of the time) they took me by stretcher down to the beach and put me on a small landing craft and took me out to the USS Bountiful hospital ship. They pulled alongside and I looked up at what looked like a hundred feet. This hoist swung out over us with four cables with rings on the end of them. I wondered "what are they going to do with that thing?" I don't mind telling you I was in la-la-land quite a bit of the time. Well, they put one of those rings on each handle of the stretcher and away I went to the top where two guys grabbed it and took off inside of the ship till they got me to the x-ray room. They walked up alongside an x-ray table and dumped me onto it like a sack of oats. They took some picture, rolled me back onto the stretcher and carried me into a room filled with bunks pretty well filled with wounded. They found an empty bunk and peeled back those sparkling clean and crisp sheets. I could not believe they were going to put this stinking, bloody, dirty body into those crisp, clean sheets.

There's not too much I can tell you about the next three days. I came to once and could see this bottle of blood hanging above me and wondered for the longest time what it was hanging there for. I finally followed the tubes down until I could see they went into my arm and I thought "oh." I really don't know how much of that was unconsciousness and how much was just catching up on sleep.

About the third or fourth day I really came around and rolled my head over till I could see the guy across the isle from me. He saw me move and looked over and grinned and said, "Hi, I didn't know for awhile if you were going to make it or not." I told him I

thought I would. The first corpsman that showed up to give me a shot of penicillin I asked where my paratroop boots were. He assured me they were there and would stay with me. They ended up giving me about 45 penicillin shots in my legs so they wouldn't have to move me so much. I carried shot scars for about six months.

I guess when the hospital ship was full we went back to Guam, where I got some other treatment. I had a corpsman come in one day and unwrap my arm where the bullet went in. I thought he was just picking off the top of it and all of a sudden he pulled a piece of rolled up gauze out of it. It hurt like hell and I told him in no uncertain terms the next time he was going to do something like that he was to let me know ahead of time.

About the third day on Guam a Red Cross lady came by and dropped a ditty bag on my bunk and told me to be shaved by the next day. I had a corpsman bring some water and a mirror the next day. When I saw myself it was no wonder she had told me to shave. I had a month's beard and my skin was so greasy and dirty that it was swollen. I looked like hell. So I washed and shaved and felt a whole lot better. I know I looked better. About the same day a Chaplain came by and told EVERYBODY to write a letter home and tell our families what happened and that we were all right. I asked if he thought that letter would beat the telegram. He assured us it would. It did.

Another day a bunch of people showed up and one of them was ex-heavy weight boxing champ, Jack Dempsey. I got to shake hands with him and he asked how we were doing. About the third day I had to go to the bathroom. I was bound and determined I was NOT going to use a bedpan. I got out of bed and got me a chair and started pushing it down the aisle. I had everyone on that end of the ward watching me to see if I would

make it. I got about halfway and turned around and went back. Boy, was I weak! I used the bedpan that one time, but not again.

We were at Guam about a week when they carted my rear to a transport ship to start back to the U.S. I asked the doctor at Guam why I couldn't be one of those flying? He looked at my x-rays and told me I had a chest wound and chest wounds don't fly. While I was on that transport I kept hearing this guy say "who wants to play cards?" About the second day I rolled over where I could see him and he has been shot through both wrists and had all ten fingers in traction. He was making jokes, but was happy to be there.

The trip to Hawaii was boring, but you had to wonder what was going to happen to you in the future. When we got to Hawaii I was just able to walk. I went out on deck to see what was going on and noticed that guys who were walking wounded were going down the gang- plank and getting on busses. Otherwise, they would carry you down and put you in an ambulance. I made up my mind there was no way I was going to ride a rough riding bus as bad as I hurt, so the first stretcher that was sent down on deck, I peeled the blanket back and climbed in, and they put me in an ambulance.

I saw some of the guys there in Hawaii. Joyner, who had been a trainer in Paratroop School, had been hit in the face with hand grenade shrapnel. He wasn't too bad and the shrapnel had missed his eyes. Quinn, I don't remember how he was hit. Murphy, had a finger clipped out of one of his hands. He got upset when a doctor put silver nitrate on the stub to clean it up. He told the doctor he was young and might grow another! He was as serious as the day is long.

Summary: Out of our twelve man squad, McGrew and Spicer were killed, all the rest were wounded except Klobutcher. He was the only one to make it all the way through. Some of them weren't so bad that they couldn't go back to duty and on to Japan. I spent a week in Hawaii and got aboard (as I remember) a U.S. Army transport ship. It was the only Army ship I was ever on. I didn't even know the army had ships before that. We got word on board that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died. I was very sorry to hear it. I know he wanted to see the end of the war.

We pulled under the Golden Gate Bridge one morning and were glad to see that. I spent about a week there, then was put on a trail full of wounded to be sent to a hospital as close as possible to home. I ended up in Astoria, Oregon, which shows you *somebody* thought Kansas was up there someplace!

It was a brand new hospital, and you should have seen the looks on the faces of the staff when they got a look at our bunch of raggedy-assed Marines. Most of us had little Marine issue clothes, so the rest of our uniforms were hospital pajamas, and we looked about as far from Marines as you could get.

I spent a year there and had one operation to cut the muscles loose from where they grew to my ribs. I also had three operations on the ulnar nerve in my upper left arm, trying to repair it, which the doctor said was about one chance in a million. I had liberty every night but Monday and Friday, so I was living it up as much as I could (making up for the time I lost while overseas).

I did get into one mess while I was there. One morning they broke the whole hospital staff out in full dress uniforms, even the Waves had to wear white gloves to present medals, and I was one of them that had to participate (big deal). They would

usually come by and throw it on your bunk and say “here’s your purple heart,” but no, this new hospital had to do it up brown! I’ll be the hospital staff thought a lot of that. Well after the medals were passed out, Chief Black told Stankas and me that the Captain wanted to see us. We both thought “What the hell have I done wrong, now?” So we went in to see the captain and he told us we were going to Seaside to give a speech the next week. We were both numb when we came out of there, and I asked Chief Black to get me off that detail. He said no way, we were stuck.

Well the Mayor of Seaside came to the hospital and picked us up and we had an argument all the way to seaside as to who was going to speak first. I lost. This was a Grandmothers’ get together. You know, who was oldest, who came the longest distance, who gave the most blood, number of boys in the service, wounded, killed, etc., and what their sons and grandsons were going through. Well after I got primed, I took off and talked and talked and talked. Pretty soon the Mayor got up and cut me off, then explained to the ladies about our wanting each other to speak first all the way to Seaside. After it was over, the reporters had to interview us, but I had a ball after I got started. After we were fed, we didn’t know what to do with ourselves since it was just before payday and we were broke. So what we did was go to the Mayor and borrow some money till payday! He just laughed, he knew how its was and that we were good for it!

One day the doctor came by, stopped and looked at me and said, “Belt, how long have you been here?” I told him almost a year. He asked “do you want to go home?” I told him I didn’t care and he said “why don’t we write you up?” and I said, “Ok.” They had four Navy captains look me over and recommend that I be discharged. In another few weeks they transferred me to a Marine detachment at a Naval Air Station. I was

there about a week and then discharged. I was discharged 10 April 1946. I returned home to El Dorado, Kansas, where I met and married the apple of my eye, Virginia Ward of August. We were married July 27, 1947, and raised two very fine boys. I would pray to God they would never have to go through what I did, but if called on to do so, they would do anything they could to protect their country and flag. Nor would I have them do anything that would dishonor their name.

Not too many days go by that I don't think of the boys we left on Iwo who never go the chance I did, to return home and enjoy the good times of raising a family. The

cost in Iwo was quite about 20,000 almost another Navy and Air somewhere wounded. A



Marines in securing a bit. 5,931 killed, wounded , plus 1,000 from the Force killed, and around 3,000 very high price for

about eight square miles of island that didn't even have its own water. We only took 216 prisoners, that was how determined they were to stay!

The bright side of this battle that was within three months after it was secured, there were 850 B-29's saved by emergency landings on Iwo, and 24,000 crew members and untold numbers that could have been shot down on their way to Japan and on their way back, by Jap fighters on Iwo. Besides that, General LeMay of the Air Force was mad as hell that Jap planes from Iwo slipped through to bomb and destroy B-29's at Saipan and Tinian. So the Air Force was safer south of Iwo and they had a clean run to

and from Japan. It also allowed lower level bombing rather than having to stay at 20,000 feet. All in all, they figured it may have saved 30,000 airmen and countless bombers. The Air Force *did* appreciate what was sacrificed for them. You might think of it another way, the size of Iwo is near that of Augusta, and the young people who were lost there were about the same as the population of Augusta.

### Odds and Ends

Louis Komnenich was from Chicago and talked in an accent that just about murdered the English language. One day on Vella LaVella our company had patrols out trying to find Jap stragglers and ran into a bunch of natives. They had something that Komnenich wanted for a souvenir, so he started with this very broken pigeon-English “me trade you tobacco to smoke in your pipe for that (whatever he was wanting from the native),” and the native answered in perfect English “No, I don’t need tobacco, but I sure do need some paper for my typewriter.” Seems that he had been a houseboy for an English-speaking missionary for a good many years.

One night on New Caledonia after taps, all was quiet and everyone was lying in his cot just listening to the sounds when Barngrover said, from the tent next to ours, Red-dog, get me a drink of water.” Red-dog said “to hell with you, get up and get your own water! Now understand that when you went to bed you tucked in your mosquito net, took a lighted candle and killed all the mosquitoes inside before trying to go to sleep, so any time you got out of your sack you had it all to do over again. Then Barngrover said “Oh,



come on Red-dog, be a buddy, get me a drink of water.” Red-dog refused and Barny begged a little more. This went on for probably half an hour and finally Red-dog said “Oh hell!” and got up and got Barngrover the drink. As soon as Barny was through you could hear him say “Thanks, *EASY!*” and Red-dog swore at him. You could hear everybody in earshot laugh for a quarter of a mile!

I talked to Rudy Engstrom at the Paratroop reunion and he told me he was wounded the first day and ended up on a Auxiliary hospital ship; then the third day they sent him back ashore. I asked what in God’s name they did that for, and he said he didn’t know. I told him I would have fought the whole crew, including the captain before I went back on that island after being wounded! But I think probably they sent him back ashore so he could be sent to a fully rigged hospital ship.

Aboard ship: It was kind of hard to keep a whole shipload of Marines out of trouble. They tried, I had been put to guarding an empty hold. It was kind of funny on rough sea. Guys would come in the aft hatchway, when the ship’s bow was high, and they would be leaning forward when the bow would go down as they were about halfway across the hold. With leaning forward they would suddenly end up trying to stop before they hit the other bulkhead. Or, they would come in when the bow was down and would be leaning back with it and it would suddenly go up and they had to reversed real quick or fall on their rear ends.

Marines would sit out on deck playing cards most of the time they weren't on duty. The ship's Captain would announce on the P.A. "clean sweep-down forward and aft" and the ship's crew would get out the fire hose and wash down the deck. They were a pain in the ass. Some guys would bum ¼ inch of rope from the crew and tie their clothes on the end and let it out behind the ship to "wash" them. It did a fair job if not left too long. I saw one guy leave his drag overnight and all he got back was rags. Books were a premium, there were about six guys waiting for every book and you had to get in line to get one.

I remember boarding a ship when we had ground swells about 15 feet high. Our landing craft would pull up alongside this ship and they would throw a cargo net over the side for us to climb up. The important thing to remember was to grab hold of that net when your landing craft was the highest, then climb like hell. If you grabbed it when it wasn't at it highest, the landing craft would do a job on you against the side of the ship.

One time on maneuvers we were walking down a road when someone yelled "air raid!" but we were tired enough we didn't even get off the road. Well these three Corsairs came by just off the road and were so close to the ground they were blowing grass everywhere. They made a big circle and came back again this time right over the road! Needless to say that time there was NOBODY standing on that road.

Once over there we had this field problem against the 3<sup>rd</sup>. We left our camp about midnight and forced marched 20 miles, waded a river and attacked the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Well they

were all using blanks and firing 1 shot at a time. We were using live ammo over their heads and had lots of firepower. After the first few rounds they all got down in their foxholes and stayed there. Naturally all the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the umpire who was overseeing the problem just raised hell. Then we had to walk that 20 miles back to camp. The next week we got a battalion order to turn in all our live ammo. We turned in a lot, but almost all of us kept a water bucket full, just in case we needed it.

The K-Bar knife I still have was issued to me in New Caledonia and I carried it up through the Solomon Islands. When I got back to the states I gave it to my brother Guy, who was in Army 29<sup>th</sup> Division and he carried it to England through the Omaha landing and on into Germany and wherever he went after that. Then he brought it back and returned it to me after the war.

I'm here to tell you that there was a lot of close calls for a lot of guys. There was so much stuff flying around for their not to be. I saw one and heard of two or three others guys that found holes in their canteens. Lane, in our company had the plastic cigarette case in his breast pocket blown away. My buddy Barngrover showed me where a bullet had gone through his web belt (that holds your pants up) under his belt buckle and out through his web belt on the other side. It didn't do a thing to him except cause a little scratch on his belly. One guy in our company showed me he had tried to fire his rifle that first day and that it wouldn't fire so when he got enough cover he started to tear it down to see why.

He noticed the stock was cracked at the receiver and after he got it apart found a bullet in the receiver that wouldn't let it work. And there were a LOT of helmets that had dents where bullets bounced off!

The luck of the draw. That was the war on Iwo Jima.

Semper Fi

Sergeant Ralph Belt

B Company 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 27<sup>th</sup> Marines 5th Marine Division

Iwo Jima 1945