

THE END OF THE END

THE LAST BATTLE FOR THE ROCK

I have the feeling that I started looking for the member of B Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines a little too late. Forty-three years and *Father Time* had beaten me to looking for some of the Marines from B Company. They had made the Great Roll Call in the Sky. Taps had been played for Gunnery Sergeant Branyak, who had been B Company's Gunnery Sergeant and with B Company from the beginning. Private Edward Kaminski was called to his final reward on 12 June 1988. I received a short note from his widow, Mrs. Harriet Kaminski, telling me of his death.

Better news came from Menard A. Broulette. He was kind enough to answer my letter and questionnaire I used to find the members of B Company. He also called me on the phone, and we spent more than a few minutes talking about the battle to take Iwo Jima. Menard wasn't in the B Company I was in; he was a member of B Company, 5th Pioneer Battalion. The 5th Pioneers were attached to the 27th Marines on Iwo Jima and Menard was in their machine gun section. Private Broulette made it all the way on Iwo Jima; one of the few who did.

When the Korean Police Action “broke out”, the Marine Corps again called on Corporal Menard Broulette’s services and the experience he had gained on Iwo. After the peace broke out in Korea and Menard returned to the States, he attended college at Louisiana College. He played football in college. Sergeant Broulette recently retired after thirty-four years with the United States Drug Administration. Fishing and hunting are his hobbies now that he sharing his retirement with his wife, Carolyn, who is a retired Special Education teacher. They presently live in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Here is the story of Private Menard A. Broulette and the Fifth Pioneer Battalion on Iwo Jima during the last battle for the rock:

What’s a Marine regiment doing with a Pioneer Battalion? What is a Pioneer Battalion? Now I knew that we had a Pioneer Battalion attached to the 27th Marines, but to tell the truth I didn’t know just what function they performed in combat. I’m indebted to former Sergeant Menard A. Broulette for this personal account of the role that the Fifth Pioneers played in combat on Iwo Jima.

It was Private M.A. Broulette who hit the beach at Iwo Jima. The 5th Pioneer Battalion landed with the fifth wave on D-Day 19 February 1945. Private Broulette hailed from Plaquemine, Louisiana. He enlisted in the

Marine Corps in December of 1943, in New Orleans, Louisiana. He underwent boot camp training at the Marine Recruit Depot in San Diego, California or just plain “Diego” to the Marines that trained there.

After boot camp, Private Menard Broulette joined the 5th Division, 27th Marines. His assignment: 5th Pioneer Battalion, Company B Machine Gun Platoon. He was only 19 years old when he landed on Iwo Jima. He would have “old eyes” after surviving Iwo Jima. “Old Eyes” comes from seeing too much death and destruction at an early age. Iwo Jima robbed Private Broulette of entering young manhood in the genteel surroundings of his home town of Paucheville, Louisiana, population 210; a small country town. He would grow up fast on Iwo Jima and would survive Iwo Jima to serve his country in it’s next war, the so-called “Korea Affair”.

But back to what did the Pioneers do? The term “Pioneers” was used to describe their main function. Well, the dictionary tells us that a pioneer is 1) a person who ventures into unknown or unclaimed territory; 2) an innovator in any field; 3) the original meaning was “a foot soldier sent out to clear the way.” I guess that all this means that, like the pioneers in the early days of our country, they could do just about anything that needed to be done, performed, built, taken apart, assembled, etc. If the brass didn’t like

something where it was, the 5th Pioneers would move it someplace else.

Washing machine broke down; call the 5th Pioneers. Need a ship unloaded; the 5th Pioneers unloaded it in record time and the price was right.

I guess a better description would be that the 5th Pioneers were the Marines' personal "Seabees", jacks-of-all-trades and master of many. True Pioneers? Yes! If necessity was the mother of inventing, improvising was the father of it. The 5th Pioneers were the best at improvising, the art of making do with what was on hand to do the next job that needed to be done. That will give you a small idea of what they could do. Like all Marines, they were Marines first and Pioneers second. The 5th Pioneers would have a chance to prove they were real, fighting Marines on Iwo Jima. The 5th Pioneers played out the last hand dealt in the siege of Iwo Jima.

First Lieutenant Harry S. Martin of C Company, 5th Pioneer Battalion, won the Fifth Division's final Congressional Medal of Honor that last bloody night on Iwo Jima for his one-man counterattack and for inspiring the Marines of the 5th Pioneers by his actions in his attack to follow him. Lt. Martin believed that the best defense is a stronger counterattack. It all happened so quickly, the attack was a complete surprise. It was 26 March 1945; D-Day plus 35 that the last battle on and for Iwo Jima was fought.

Private Menard A. Broulette was awakened by the sound of gunfire and it sounded like it was in his area. Pvt. Broulette and the Marine Pioneers of B Company were dead tired. This was to be their last night on the rock. All day long they had worked at packing all of their gear and equipment. At daybreak it would be load out time. The two things that hadn't been packed were the weapons and ammunition. Good thing; they would need them.

The full brunt of the final attack fell on the 5th Pioneer Battalion. In this final battle the 5th Pioneers did the United States Marine Corps and their country proud. On that night over 200 desperate, thirsty and hunger-crazed Japanese made their final, fanatical attack in the battle for the possession of the rock called Iwo Jima. The target was by chance only.

In the cold gray dawn of an Iwo Jima morning the Japanese defenders changed roles and became the attackers. The target wasn't important; this was a suicide mission, a mass form of hara-kiri. This was a banzai attack, but a carefully planned one. "No noise" was the command of the Japanese officer in charge. Surprise is a weapon. It was to be to the death. The plan was to take as many Marines as they could with them.

The thrust of the banzai attack took the Japanese offensive into a Seabees and Air Force tent area. Our men were fast asleep in their tents; they didn't have a chance. Only normal night patrols were out after the siege was over, right? Wrong! The Japanese survivors were holed up in their bypassed underground caverns, waiting for this moment. Trapped men make desperate and fanatical fighters. Their situation was desperate and without hope. The Japanese water supply was exhausted, the last foodstuff had been distributed, final prayers were said and letter written home. They wrote them knowing full well they would never be posted.

The Japanese officers laid out the plans for their fight to the death. The weapons were mostly Marine Corps issue which had been confiscated during daring night-time infiltrating (the Japanese term for infiltrating was called "cutting in") of the Marines' supply depots.

The Japanese attackers had taken the oath of the Kamikazes. The Oath of the Kamikazes was not just for one-way airplane pilots with instructions to aim their planes like bullets at U.S. Naval ships; any Japanese warrior could take this oath. It entitled them to die for the Empire of the Rising Sun. The time had come to fulfill that oath; the rising sun was setting and the Iwo Jima attackers would go down with it.

The 5th Pioneer Battalion quickly joined the battle; this was to be one of the most frenzied of all the battles for Iwo Jima. With Lt. Martin in the vanguard, the 5th Marine Division, 5th Pioneer Battalion annihilated their attackers. The battle raged on for about two and a half hours. The 5th Pioneers used every weapon at their command.

Private Broulette got his machine gun in action and returned the fire to the attacking Japanese troops. Everyone grabbed some type of weapon: M-1 rifles, carbines, and hand grenades. You name the weapon, they used it to good effect. It was man-to-man combat, to the death; winners take all.

The battle cost Lt. Martin his life. He fell victim to a Japanese hand grenade, after being wounded twice in his first encounter with the Japanese attackers that ghastly night. A body count was conducted at first light of morning. 198 Japanese dead littered the landscape. The last banzai attack had failed, as the Japanese attackers knew it would. A large percent were officers who died with their swords at their sides. There were no Japanese survivors, no prisoners taken and almost all the Japanese dead had previous wounds. The 5th Pioneers lost 9 killed and 31 wounded. The Navy and Air Force personnel loss of life was heavy; I am not aware of the true count.

Iwo Jima will become hallowed ground to the Japanese people. The name Iwo Jima will be spoken with the same reverence as Tabaru Zaka, a famed battlefield of the 1877 Japanese civil war. The Marines of the 5th Marine Division know Tabaru Zaka as the bloody, infamous Hill 362A. The Japanese named Hill 362B, “Tenzan,” or “heavenly peak,” after a landmark in Saga, Kyushu. To the 5th Division Marines, Hill 362B was the Devil’s Peak, although it was only referred to by its map designation of Hill 362B.

The next day it was business, as usual. The 5th Pioneers loaded their gear and sailed away from the rock. I believe the 5th Pioneers were the last members of the 5th Marine Division to leave Iwo Jima. They didn’t wave good-bye. This was still the day of D plus 35, a total of 36 days in the living hell of Iwo Jima, for the courageous 5th Pioneers.

