

WWII Experience

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My experiences as a member of The Machine Gun Platoon, B-Co., 1st Bn., 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division, on Iwo Jima, 19 Feb.1945 - 11 March 1945.

On January 27, 1945, we left Pearl Harbor aboard the (APA 106) Hansford for Iwo Jima. It wasn't until we were well out to sea that we were told officially that our objective was a small island of volcanic ash, sulfur and rock between Saipan and Japan.

Life aboard ship was easy for the first few days; all we did was eat, sleep and play cards. Then we began to have classes each day, studying maps, aerial photographs, and relief models of the objective. The plan of attack was explained in detail over and over again. The Fifth Division was to land on the two most southeastern beaches with the assault battalions in LTV's (amphibious tractors) following a wave of LVT(A)'s (amphibious tanks). The 27th Marines would land on the right of the 28th Marines, advance inland as rapidly as possible, and go up to the end of Airfield No. 1 (Motoyama No.1), drive across to the western beaches and turn north. Meanwhile the 28th had the job of taking Mt. Suribachi.

On February 5, the convoy arrived at Eniwetok atoll where we stayed for two days. Four days later, February 13, we arrived at Saipan. There we transferred to LST 10 (Landing Ship Tank) which would take us to Iwo Jima. At Saipan we received our allotments of ammunition and rations. A final rehearsal was carried out with a simulated landing on the West Coast of Tinian. On February 16, we started the last leg of our journey. During the night of Feb.17, our LST lost steerage. I remember being on guard duty on the tank deck when we heard warning blasts on the ship's horn. We learned later that it signaled stand by for collision. Fortunately whatever ships were close by missed. Next morning the LST was adrift with only a destroyer escort off our starboard. Sometime during the day the steering mechanism was fixed and the ship got underway. The LST arrived at Iwo Jima sometime during the early hours of February 19th ready to discharge its cargo of amphibious tractors and Marines.

We could see the flashes of the big guns of our battleships and cruisers. Some of the old refloated battleships from the attack on Pearl Harbor were there: The New York, Arkansas, Texas, Idaho, Nevada and Tennessee. As dawn began to break we could make out the outlines of the other ships and finally Iwo itself with Mt. Suribachi poking up from the horizon, black and forbidding, warning of death, hate and suffering. After a breakfast of steak and coffee, we went below to the tank deck to board our amphibious tractors; the bow doors opened and the ramp went down. Daylight came flooding in, and the motors of the LTV's roared into life one by one; slowly they moved out of the LST and became free floating. There were the ships of the line not 1000 yards from shore firing on to the beaches and Mt. Suribachi.

LCS's (Landing Craft Support) were firing rockets onto the beaches. One battleship fired a broadside as we passed by, it actually moved back in the water from the recoil.

Overhead the sky was full of planes: observation planes, fighters strafing and bombing Mt.Suribachi and the beach. Clouds of smoke and dust hung over the island.

When all the LTV's in our wave were in position we started our run to the shore. As we passed close by a Command and Control ship, probably the USS Eldorado, men aboard were waving and taking pictures. A Coast Guard boat led us safely around a group of rocks to our landing on Red Beach 2. Preceding us was a wave of armored LTV(A)'s (Amphibious Tanks). They got on the beach at such an angle that they had to back off into the water in order to fire at any targets.

Our tractor climbed on to the beach quickly let the rear-facing ramp down and we scrambled out. Since I had manned the 30-caliber machine gun on the tractor going in, I was the last man out. Saying the 23rd Psalm as I knelt on the black sand, I looked north along the beach and notice a plane flying down the beach; at first I thought it might be a Jap strafing, but instead it was a navy observation plane. The Japs opened up with an anti-aircraft gun and hit the plane. As it flew by at about 50 feet above the beach I could see the pilot slumped forward and the observer in the back seat facing me with a look on his face I will never forget. The plane quickly turned towards the ocean and crashed in the area where waves of amphibious tractors of the 28th Marines were coming in. About the same time mortar shells began to fall and the sound of a Jap machine gun started.

I was carrying approximately 80 pounds of equipment and found it hard to move in the black volcanic sand. I would run maybe 20 yards to a shell hole and would be out of breath. Recovering I would get up and run again, always moving foreword. The acrid smell of burnt powder was bad.

Being the eighth man of our machine gun squad, I brought up the rear. Shrapnel hit the man I was following (Herman Keller). He was already covering the wound with a dressing. Asking if he needed assistance, I noticed a navy corpsman near by and told him about Herman. I asked if the man he was following was close? He told me that he had never been in contact with any of the squad. The only thing left for me to do was to continue forward hoping to make contact with the squad somewhere up by the airfield.

Crawling up a drainage ditch, I noticed a wire strung across my path, what do I do? A sergeant came along and told me to crawl up out of the ditch beside him and we moved on up on to the airfield. I have often wondered should I have marked the wire with a piece of cloth or something?

As we crawled onto the field we were bracketed with shellfire. Laying low in a shell hole we finally got up an enough nerve to look around and get our bearings. We could see

across the airfield but none of our men were in sight. Finally a few more men came up and told us where the rest of the company was located. Sometime later I made contact with the men that were left of our squad. Of the eight men who made the landing, only four of us were left (Cpl. George Chelf, Pfc. Willis Dagget, Pfc. Jack Brosnan and Me). Later, however, we found another member of our squad, Pvt. Thomas Keith; he had gone part way across the airfield with a buddy from another squad. Three Members of our squad didn't make it, Squad leader Cpl. Guy Brookshire, wounded on the beach; Pvt. Herman Keller, wounded just off the beach; and Pfc. Robert McDougald, who died of wounds just off the beach.

Our machine gun was set up under a Japanese concrete bomb shelter, which served as excellent protection. I had just finished cleaning the sand from my carbine when someone spotted a number of Japs running towards a group of wrecked planes; a number of us stood up and fired. Almost immediately we were subjected to mortar fire.

Our Company, having lost many of its officers and NCO's getting to the airfield, were ordered to hold our present positions until a reserve company relieved us about noon. Our platoon leader 1st Lt. John A. Dreger as well as GY. SGT. Stanley H. Kavato were both killed just up from the landing beach.

Looking back to the beach as we withdrew to the base of the airfield we could see wreckage and stranded equipment everywhere. Landing craft were still bringing in supplies and men, but were drawing heavy artillery and mortar fire.

Later that afternoon we attempted to go around the end of the airfield. Each time we started the Japs would spot us and all hell would break loose. After three attempts, we finally made it to the other side.

We dug in around the Battalion Command Post and just before dark went up to where a number of wrecked Jap planes were to look them over. Didn't take long for us to scramble back to our foxholes when snipers started shooting. Just after that an amphibious tractor brought up ammunition. Luckily we got a five-gallon can of water off the tractor. Even though it tasted of gasoline it was a welcome drink.

Pfc. Jack Brosnan was my foxhole buddy; we were so exhausted that we both fell a sleep. The next morning we learned that the Japs had counterattacked in strength along our front lines. If they had broken through we probably wouldn't be here. Never again did both of us sleep at the same time.

Our battalion remained in reserve all day D+1(Feb.20), staying close behind the advancing forces. We were pinned down by mortar fire from time to time through out

the day. Every now and then the Japs would let go with a large mortar. It was so large you could see it go up and finally fall off and start down. There was only one good thing about these mortar shells; you could hear it take off from its launching place and therefore you always had warning that one was on its way.

On the night of D+1 (Feb. 20), Co. B moved up to the front to fill in a gap in our lines. I remember being sent back with other members of our squad to an ammunition dump to bring back more ammunition for our guns. Not knowing any better I brought back a case of 50-cal. ammunition instead of 30 cal. for our gun. I told 1st Lt. James Mayenschein I would go back and bring back a case of 30 cal. But he said we had enough. He must have noticed I was dead tired. In training with machine guns we never had to go back for more than a box of ammunition. Just one of the things you learn with on-the-job training.

Each of us had a two-hour watch during the night. It was a clear chilly night with no moon. We all expected the Japs to attack. The only light came from flares that were fired every two minutes from destroyers out at sea or from our mortar platoons. They floated down by parachute lighting up the front lines. The eerie shadows cast when the flares floated down made everything ghostly. The waiting was terrible. The Navy was blasting Mt. Suribachi with all kinds of shells. From where I lay it looked like a big 4th of July celebration. Every so often a Jap automatic weapon would open up and yellow tracers would arc across the sky to the front of our position.

On the morning of D+2 (Feb. 21), as we were moving out, the Japs welcomed us with an intense mortar barrage. It was at this time an incident occurred which has always stayed with me. As I checked my carbine, I moved the safety and for some reason pulled the trigger. My mind must have been on the mortar barrage because the weapon fired, the round going into the ground. It could just as well hit the Marine walking beside me.

Attacking groups made good gains from 900-1000 yards during the morning. As a large gap developed during the morning between the 4th Marine Division and our right flank; our battalion was ordered up from reserve to fill the gap.

Jap snipers were getting to be more of a menace as we advanced up the island. That afternoon, the sergeant I was with on D-Day when we went over the top on to the airfield was wounded in the head by a sniper's bullet.

That night my fox hole buddy (Pfc. Jack J. Brosnan) and I dug in on the rim of a large shell hole. The enemy was very active and counterattacked along our northern front a number of times until dawn.

Early in the morning of D+3 (Feb. 22) the 26th Marines began to pass through our lines to continue the attack. As usual with any activity the Japs opened up with their artillery and mortars. A couple of communication men of the 26th came scrambling into the large shell hole for refuge. One of them asked me if he could use my entrenching tool. I told him we would be leaving soon, and they could have our foxhole. He said they would dig a foxhole down in the shell hole. A short time later he brought my shovel back. Within minutes a shell exploded in the hole killing both men.

From the same shelling four of our men were wounded when a mortar shell exploded near their foxhole. One of those hit was Pvt. Hector D. Martinez who had gone through Machine Gun School with me back at Camp Pendelton. It was a cold rainy day as we withdrew from the front lines.

That night D+3(Feb.22) and early morning ofD+4(Feb.23) the Japs tried to make a landing from boats behind our lines in the vicinity of where we were dug in. One alert machine gun crew finished them off before they got very far. I remember staying awake most of the night watching for any Japs who might have gotten through. It was still raining and we were cold and wet. We tried to construct a covering over our foxhole using our ponchos, and every so often the roof would get too heavy and we would be drenched.

The morning of D+4(Feb.23) cleared up and around noon someone noticed the flag flying from atop of Mt. Suribachi. Seeing the flag gave everyone a big lift. We hoped our job would be soon over.

Company B of the 27th Marines stayed in reserve until D+ 8 (Feb.27), when we ordered to the front lines to relieve another Company of the 27th Marines.

Going up to the front that morning we watched a half-track play hid and seek with Jap artillery and mortar fire. First, it would run out from behind a hill fire several rounds then back behind the hill just as incoming rounds would fall where the half-track had been. I saw more dead Japs this day than on any other. They usually carried their dead back with them as they withdrew from an area. Later on in the battle they would booby trap their dead as well as dead Marines.

As we came up to the front the company we were relieving were just evacuating its casualties from its last assault on a ridge to their front. We tried to gain possession of the ridge that they had withdrawn from. As soon as we started up the incline to the top of the ridge we were met with heavy shelling and had to withdraw to the bottom taking shelter in a drainage ditch. Shortly after this some riflemen climbed up on some rocks to our left and spotted a wounded Marine out on the open ground. Several men went out and

dragged him back to the drainage ditch that we were in. He had laid out in the open most of the afternoon, unable to crawl because of several wounds in the region of his knee.

Late that evening a 37mm anti-tank gun was brought forward just to our right, facing the gorge to our immediate front. Our machine gun was positioned just to the left of the gorge. Barbed wire concertina was placed all along in front of our lines. A Marine and his dog dug in just in front of our foxhole.

All night Japs tried to infiltrate our lines. Riflemen were kept busy knocking them down. In the morning D+9 (Feb. 28) dead Japs were all around, a few hanging on the barbed wire; one, who had made it through the wire, lay dead just past our machine gun position.

By 08:00 we were again prepared to take the ridge to our front. As soon as our artillery, naval gunfire, rockets, and support from carrier-based aircraft was completed, we went up over the ridge we had tried to take the evening before. Thanks be to God our enemy had not come up out of their holes. We advanced across the open plateau as fast as possible to the base of Hill 362A, expecting the Japs to open up with mortars and automatic weapons at any time. We went up the opening on the left side of the hill to the top (See the picture of Hill 362A). At first there was sporadic automatic fire. Our squad leader Cpl. George Chelf sent our first gunner, Pfc. Willis Dagget, forward to the right with the tripod; He was immediately hit in the area of the face by machine gun fire. Seeing the Jap gunners withdraw, a corpsman went forward to attend to Dagget. The only thing he could do was to give him a shot of morphine before he died.

It soon became apparent that if we stayed on top we would be annihilated. Japs were popping up from spider holes and mortar shells were falling all around. Our Executive Officer, 1st Lt. James Mayenschein, ordered us to withdraw to just below the top of the hill to some shell-hole depressions.

As stretcher-bearers carried out the wounded, snipers began their daily target practice. We were pinned down for some time on the side of the hill. Any one who dared to look over the side was asking for a bullet. Later our squad made it down to the base of the hill. I was next to George Chelf when I saw litter bearers having trouble carrying wounded because of a sniper. George said, "I think I know where that S.O.B. is." He got up-was just getting set to fire his rifle and I saw something black fly up in front of his face. He quivered and slumped down, rifle still clutched in his hands, a bullet between the eyes. At the Fifth Marine Division Association reunion in Scottsdale, AZ, in 1989, I met Lloyd Hurd, who was a member of the 2nd Squad, 2nd Section of our machine gun platoon. He reminded me that he along with Pfc. Jack J. Brosnan were along side me when George Chelf was killed. Not long after that Jack Brosnan and I helped carry a

wounded Marine back down to an aid station. Luckily the sniper fire had let up for awhile.

When we returned, we went back up in the rocks on the side of hill 362A. Suddenly the Jap snipers came to life again and kept us pinned down until late that afternoon. As we sat in this depression we could see long lines of Marines moving up from the other end of the island. Just before dark we were ordered to go around the right side of hill 362A to tie in with another battalion for the night. Our Ex. Officer 1st Lt. James Mayenschein took what was left of our machine gun squad and a few riflemen and started across an open area to the right of the hill. Pfc. Ed Tucker was now our squad leader; in addition, a new replacement had joined us as an ammunition carrier. I believe our squad consisted of Pfc. Ed Tucker, Pfc. Jack Brosnan, Pvt. Thomas Keith, Me and the new replacement, who had worked on the beach in an unloading party. Ed had been wounded in the leg on D-day by shrapnel. Even though this wound was still draining he volunteered to rejoin the machine gun platoon on D + 4 (Feb. 23). We had gotten about half way across with 1st Lt. Mayenschein in the lead with a few riflemen followed by our machine gun squad at an interval of 40 to 50 yards. Suddenly a Jap machine gun opened up, splitting us from the forward group. Four of us made it to a small outcrop of rock. The new man didn't. The Japs fired a large caliber mortar, one round landing very close. A piece of shrapnel so large it looked to be in slow motion came towards us, Jack moved his foot and the large chunk of steel just missed. Ed, thinking he should move closer to Lt. Mayenschein, ran to a near by shell hole; the Jap machine gun opened up on him, rounds were hitting at his heels as he dove into the hole. He signaled that he was all right and that we should go back. I wondered at the time if Ed was really all right. Keith was the first to leave; after a few minutes I finally got up enough nerve to try. Picking up my boxes of ammunition and rifle I ran zigzagging back. I knew they were firing at me as I could hear the whine of the bullets. I thought they might have gotten Jack but he finally showed up. He said the Japs were kicking up dust at my heels all the way back.

We lost a mighty fine Marine that evening; 1st Lt. Mayenschein was killed trying to get his wounded back to our lines. Ed didn't make it either; he was found by members of the 28th Marines next morning March 1(D+10) badly wounded. He died later that day of his wounds. Both 1st Lt. Mayenschein and Pfc. Ed Tucker were awarded Silver Stars for their acts of bravery on Iwo Jima.

When we got back to our lines we found that hot coffee had been brought up along with maybe donuts. First time since we were aboard ship that we had anything but powdered coffee to drink, let alone something besides tropical chocolate for a treat.

The next morning March 1(D+10) the 28th Marines moved through our lines. They had been busy sealing caves around Mt. Suribachi and providing security in that area. Some

of the men were carrying their Jap souvenirs. I thought to myself-- boy are you in for an awakening. We went back for replacements and reorganization. While back in our rest area we received our first mail since being on Iwo.

Late on the afternoon of March 3 (D+ 12) we moved to the middle of the island in what had been the Third Marine Division zone of action until a boundary change on about March 1. We were maybe 200-250 yards just south of the East End of the unfinished Motoyama Airfield No.3; the area still had a number of unsealed caves with Japs still alive inside. Demolition squads were busy sealing the caves shut. A Marine language officer had persuaded a "Korean" worker to come out of one cave and talked him into going back in to talk to his comrades about surrendering. He returned empty handed with information that even though the cave was to be sealed they would blow themselves out at 23:00 hrs. Several machine gun squads in addition to rifle squads were placed on top of the ridge over which the Japs had been sealed, forming a perimeter defense. I took the first watch, waking the other members of our squad maybe 10 minutes before the Japs were to blow themselves up. Exactly on the hour all hell broke loose. A number of powerful explosions came from within the ridge, sending geysers of flame, smoke and rocks into the air. Men were blown out of their foxholes; I assume the Japs placed explosives beneath areas where they had heard Marines digging their foxholes. Fortunately for us they miscalculated by a few feet. I remember turning over on my stomach, holding my helmet as rocks rained down over us and shaking like a leaf. Some men jumped up and went running off the ridge, screaming and yelling don't shoot, I'm a Marine. How many B-company Marines were originally on the ridge that night I do not know. I know our squad stayed.

Later that morning March 4 (D+ 13), we moved on to the unfinished Airfield No. 3. Here the ground besides being covered with small stones was very warm with steam issuing from it in places. We were committed to attack early in the afternoon. Jap sniper fire was very active. One of our replacement officers was lost almost immediately along with several riflemen as we tried to move across the airstrip. Finally by keeping close to the rocky ridges on one side we were successful. A battery of Japanese field pieces sat out in the open, their crews having withdrawn. When we reached the field pieces intense mortar fire drove us back among some Banyan trees next to the ridge. We watched helplessly as a column of marines started across the open field only to be immediately trapped in the open by enemy fire. Keeping under cover the rest of the afternoon, we made a small gain just before nightfall and dug in for the night.

Heavy machine guns and case after case of ammunition and grenades were brought forward. No sooner had we set up our machine gun than we were bracketed by artillery fire. One shell exploded just in front of my foxhole, covering me with dirt. About 100 yards to the front lay a ridge extending all along our front lines. Early in the morning as I stood my watch I could hear Japs making noises on the other side of the ridge. Eventually

I spotted an infiltrator cautiously climb over a saddle in the ridge and start for our lines. Every time a parachute flare would light up the area the Jap would freeze, then start forward after the flare died out. I woke up Pvt. Keith and we waited for him to get closer before we opened fire. I fired one shot and my carbine jammed having been covered with dirt earlier. Others took up the task of sending him to his ancestors.

The remainder of the night the talking of the Japs on the other side of the ridge got louder. A telephone call back to our mortar section brought a shelling of the area, possibly breaking up a planned early morning attack.

Early morning of March 5 (D+ 14) brought heavy artillery fire, some again hitting close to our position. One shell burst covered two men with dirt as they lay in their foxhole. Forward observers spotted the gun positions and called for artillery fire to silence them. Later that morning Japs were seen trying to move a heavy Jap machine gun just in front of the ridge to our front. Thomas Keith opened up on them with the machine gun exploding several boxes of ammunition and probably killing the Japanese. Just after this a wounded Marine Lt. from 1/26 was brought into our gun position. He had been out in front of our lines reconnoitering the area since his company was relieving us that morning. About 09:00 we were relieved, leaving our machine gun and ammunition, with the men taking over our position.

As we started back to our rest area we heard that our battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Butler had been killed. As we passed road junction RJ 338 his jeep was still sitting there. He was a well-respected Marine.

This was really a great day for me as it was my 19th birthday and I could not have a better present. Back in our rest area we were issued new clothes and ate the luxurious 10 in 1 rations.

My feet were beginning to give me trouble because I had not taken my shoes off for so long. I had to wear an extra pair of wool socks to keep from getting blisters. G.I. problems had also developed so the corpsman lined all of us up having problems and gave us a teaspoon of paregoric. Terrible tasting stuff but it worked.

We stayed in this reserve area until the morning of March 7(D+ 16) when we again were committed to attack. Our company didn't do much but wait just behind the forward attacking unit. After dark we moved back maybe 300 yards and dug in for the night.

Morning of March 8 (D+17), we moved just behind a mortar section. Off and on we were subject to Jap mortar fire. Our command post received two direct hits killing and wounding a number of men. Our new CO decided that instead of staying where we were, and losing men, we might as well be on the front lines.

On the morning of March 9 (D+ 17) we moved forward; crawling; enemy mortar and sniper fire was bad. Not 50 yards from our original position we came up on two buried Jap tanks that had been knocked out earlier. They were very difficult to see; all of a sudden I was looking at the barrel of a cannon and the firing slit above. I again had a guardian angle looking out for me a dud mortar shell lit a couple of feet in front of me. The area we were now in made it almost impossible to move without being fired upon. It was a jumbled mass of rocks and caves. Flame-throwers were busy burning out many caves which had been by-passed earlier. The stench of burned and rotting flesh was sickening. Dead bodies and parts of bodies, both Marines and Japs, lay everywhere covered with flies and maggots. A Marine spotted a cave of Japs. He wanted to learn how to operate a bazooka so he could clean them out. As he sat just below me in a shell hole, receiving instructions a Jap sniper from somewhere took a shot at him. The bullet hit the bazooka and ricocheted into the Marine, putting him out of action. I crawled along the wall I was against as fast as I could to get away from there. Our machine gun squad, what was left of it, moved into an established gun position. Suddenly a group of Japs ran across in front trying to get to another cave. Not wanting to give our position away, riflemen opened up cutting most of them down. We spent a restless night waiting for infiltrators. A string of tin cans 15 feet in front of us should have warned us if they got that close. We could hear artillery shells whistling as they passed over our position. A Jap ammunition dump was set on fire resulting in exploding shells, even during the day of March 10 (D+ 19). Sometime in the morning one of our flame throwing tanks came up and set fire to one of our tanks that had been disabled by a land mine the day before. It must have been assumed that it was too dangerous to try and recover the tank. This also prevented the Japs from getting inside the tank and using its 75mm gun on us. From our position we were not more than 1000 yards from the north East Coast. Because of rocks and ridges we could not see the ocean, but did see Marines sky lighting them selves on the farthest ridge.

That night we were again kept awake thinking we could hear Japs very close. Every now and then we would throw an illumination grenade to our front. Our artillery kept up steady shelling of enemy positions. One salvo came over too low hitting the top of the cliff above us. Luckily no one was hit.

The morning of March 11 (D+20), an all out attack was initiated to capture the remaining part of the island. All 12 battalions of marine artillery fired for 12 minutes. Then the riflemen started their advance. Thomas Keith and I set up our gun atop a ridgeline to give covering fire. Almost as soon as our artillery fire lifted the Japs answered with mortar fire. We watched the mortar shells work their way towards our position. Ordered to leave our position, we ran down between two cliffs that looked to provide cover. I knelt down facing the forward cliff. I turned around to talk to another Marine leaning against the other wall. Just then I saw a mortar shell land just to the left of his head and shoulder. I thought to myself, boy he got it. The next thing I remember was feeling

something hit my right shoulder very hard. I put my hand over it and brought it away with red blood. I momentarily couldn't remember the code word for corpsman, but it came to me quickly: Tallulah, Tallulah! Several of my buddies ran over to me, I then discovered there was a hole in my right hip also.

They removed my 782 gear and carried me over to a cliff that had an overhang protecting anyone under it from mortar fire. There a corpsman looked at the wounds, put compresses over them, and gave me a shot of morphine. Interestingly the Marine that was next to the exploding knee mortar shell didn't get a scratch. That round had my name on it. Soon stretcher-bearers arrived, as they lifted me up, I tried to pick up my helmet but couldn't hold on to it. I remember wishing the remaining members of the squad luck as well as Sgt. Claude D. Lewis our section leader who showed great concern for all members of our section. They carried me to a waiting Jeep ambulance. As soon as they had a full load of wounded they drove to forward aid station where my wounds were redressed. Again we moved, this time to Fifth Marine Division Field Hospital where I waited to see a doctor. While waiting I cleaned out my pockets, finding a number of hand grenades in my jacket pocket. A corpsman took them from me, handling them like they might break. As the doctor probed for the shrapnel I asked him if I could have the pieces for a lasting souvenir. The pieces were too deep and embedded in bone. He also said I was very lucky if the shrapnel in my hip had been a few centimeters higher it would have penetrated my kidney. Soon I was on a cot in a ward sleeping a very sound sleep. When I awoke they told me I was to be evacuated by plane to another hospital. Around 16:00 hours, I was taken to the airfield to be loaded on a Marine transport. As I lay under the wing I thought I recognized one of the flight crew. Sure enough Staff Sergeant Floyd Stone was the radio operator. His folks lived two blocks down the street from my home in Rapid City, SD. We went to the same church and belonged to the same scout troop. Just seeing him really lifted my spirits.

When the plane landed on Guam a few hours later I asked Floyd if he would write a letter to my folks. I had not written a letter home since January. I have often thought how inconsiderate of me. The radio and newspapers were full of stories about Iwo Jima and named the divisions fighting. My excuse was that I was superstitious; it seemed like any one writing letters home got killed, which of course wasn't true. Incidentally, my folks received his letter a few days later; I still have that letter, what a relief to my family.

Because of so many casualties the Navy hospital on Guam was full, so they sent us to the U.S. Army Field Hospital (204). Every day we eagerly waited news of the fighting on Iwo; hoping it was over, wondering who was left.

The few personal things I carried off Iwo included a couple of letters with my bloody fingerprints on them. Keys to my seabag with a four-leaf clover imbedded in plastic. A religious medallion, New Testament, a service prayer book, plus a K-bar knife I had stuck

in my leggings. And of course my dog tags. I remember my toes being so sore that for a couple of days I didn't even want a sheet covering them.

Eventually we were issued clothing, but instead of Marine it was army fatigues, and a few dollars spending money. One of the wounded of our group was a Navy Corpman from B-3rd Medical A/A George A. Ingham, who had received multiple shrapnel wounds when he opened a box of booby-trapped chopsticks. He kept us laughing with his jokes and antics while we were confined to our beds.

On 21 March, 1945, I was transferred by air, by way of Einewetok and Johnson Island, to Aiea Naval Hospital No. 10 on Oahu, Territory of Hawaii. There I recuperated until 26 April, when I flew back to States. I spent the next three weeks at the USN Hospital, Oakland, California. From there a large group traveled by hospital train, all the coaches painted white with red crosses on the sides, to USN Hospital, Great Lakes, Illinois. As the train passed through towns, crowds of people stood on the station platforms and waved. On the fourth of July 1945, a ceremony was held at the hospital for the awarding of Purple Hearts to a large group of Sailors and Marines.

Not long after this I received orders for a 30-day convalescent leave; it was great to be home with my family. When my leave was up, I reported to the Marine Barracks, Great Lakes, IL., for return to active duty. Some one said that we could also request our 30 day annual leave, so I requested a Captains Mast and was given my 30 day annual leave; so back to South Dakota. While there Staff Sergeant Floyd Stone was home on leave as well as Pfc. Elmer Stensaas also of the 27th Marines; he had been wounded in the head while carrying his flame thrower on Iwo. We never ran into each other at Camp Tarawa, even though we were in the same area.

While at home news of the dropping of the A-bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima was received. My leave time up, I reported to the Marine Barracks-R&R Center, Navy Yard, Philadelphia, PA. While on liberty in Philadelphia, news came that the Japanese had surrendered. It didn't take long for a celebration to start. The city of brotherly love certainly lived up to its name; never have I kissed so many girls in one night, a night I will never forget.

Several days later a number of us were transferred to Camp LeJeune, NC. One incident I remember about the trip involved the first colored Marine that I had ever seen being transferred with the group.

All went well until we left Washington, DC, the conductor came through our car and told us the colored Marine had to move back with the other colored people. We protested to think a man in the uniform of the US Marine Corps was to be treated like this was unreal.

The conductor said he goes back or the train stops and the MP's will settle the problem. Jim Crow Law had come into effect when we crossed the Mason-Dixon Line.

Several weeks later I was being transferred again, this time on a troop train to Camp Pendleton, joining the 82nd Replacement Draft at Camp DeLuz. After examining records it was determined that I probably had about a year left before being discharged so it was not worth my being shipped overseas again.

Consequently, in November I found myself at the Naval Ammunition Depot, Hastings, NE, where I served in the Guard Detachment until June 1946: the best duty I ever had in the Marine Corps. I traveled from Hastings, NE, to the Marine Separation Center, Naval Trng. Center, Great Lakes, IL, for discharge on June 4, 1946. My tour of duty in the US Marine Corps was finished.

Our family is still associated with the US Marine Corps; in 1986 our son James M. Martin, after finishing the Marine Platoon Leaders Course at Quantico, VA, and graduating from South Dakota State University, was commissioned a 2nd Lt. of Marines. A very proud day for Shirley and Me as he received his bars in our home. After finishing Basic School at Quantico he attended Dispersing School at Camp LeJune, NC. Now 15 years later He is a Major serving in Stuttgart Germany with HQ-USEUCOM.

My Grandson John E. Shubeck, son of Paul and Carol Shubeck has joined the Marine Corps Reserve and experienced that great challenge of Marine Corps Boot Camp at San Diego. He successfully finished on 25 May 2001 and is now wears the Marine Corps Emblem with pride. After infantry training at Camp Pendleton he was transferred to cooks school in Virginia, finishing first in his class he was promoted to Lance Cpl. Now with the 4th Marine Air Wing Reserve in Minneapolis. He drives once a month from the University of South Dakota to Minneapolis for week-end drill. In June 2002 he was promoted to Cpl. after being in the Corps only 14 months. I was still a Pfc. after 24 months.

Semper Fi !

James (Jim) M. Martin, Jr. Serial Number 1001001 USMCR