CHAPTER TEN

NEW ZEALAND

I left Samoa with the memories of those beautiful people and their paradise indelibly stamped in my mind. We didn't know where we were going until we were well out to sea. For all we men knew, we were going into combat. Again Speed came on the intercom and told us it was New Zealand. New Zealand! I quit sharpening my knife.

Near the end of the voyage, I sat in a blackjack game with the C. O. of M Company, Wade Jackson. We'd become fast friends on Samoa and he was the dangest gambler I've ever seen. He was a card counter in blackjack and a percentage player in poker who could tell you the odds on every hand. He could sit at a table for eternity. A weekend was just a short stint to him. On payday he began by cleaning out the company and battalion. From there he moved to bigger games at regiment, division, and then on to the winners of other outfits in the Army, Air Corps, and Seabees. By the next payday he was ready to start again. I'd bunked in the same tent with him. He usually came in at about four a. m., shucked his

money out in wind rows, and grabbed an hour's sleep before work. He had a smart kid whom he used as a runner and to make out money orders. This kid spent many forenoons buying $ 100 money orders and sending them to Georgia to the major's wife. Wherever Major Jackson was stationed in the States, he could live in his own house. He owned them all over, plus farms in Georgia.

I seldom played, except for an occasional blackjack game. This time every card fell right and when New Zealand appeared on the horizon, I was $ 1, 400 ahead. We had to break off to prepare for docking. Jackson badgered me from that day on to get back into the game. He couldn't stand to lose to anyone. To keep him from getting back my dough I spent every damn cent.

We docked at Auckland late in May, 1943. We were honed to a razor's edge. Woe be unto the Japanese if we would've gone on an operation from Samoa. Now we were to spend six weeks in a civilized country, and the edge would be dulled somewhat. Oh well, what the hell. These might be the last city lights some of us would see.

The first New Zealander I talked to was on the docks. There was a high chain link fence that locked us in the dock area. This little cockney-like character was peering through the fence. Make friends with the natives was my motto. There were throngs of girls to welcome

us, so I said to him, "Gee, you sure have a lot of beautiful girls in this country."

He straightened his cap, glanced furtively from side to side, shielded his lips with his hand and said, "Aye, and they all have big mickies, too!"

We had indoctrinated all the men to take a prophylactic, in case sexual intercourse should come along. This was an elaborate and uncomfortable process of inserting a cream inside the urethral canal. In Panama the military maintained stations where the men lined up in rows for this treatment. They looked like businessmen getting their shoes shined in a train station. It was more certain protection than that provided by a condom. About a half hour after docking at Auckland, before any of us were let past the chain link fence, one of my boys asked me where he could get another pro.

"For god's sake, man," I said, "how did you do it?"

He grinned, "Through the fence, Lieutenant, through the fence."

We moved out in the "leads" to a place called Wackaracki Park. We had six-man tents equipped with little heating stoves. New Zealand is semi-tropical, but I've never gotten so miserably

cold. We'd fill the stove with coal, go to bed, and then the fire would burn out and everyone would be too cold to get up and fix it. Naturally, you had to urinate all night, as always is the case in cold weather. At first we had to make a long trip through the mud to the head, or illegally do it outside the tent. Eventually we set fifty-gallon drums cut in half within easy access to all hands. They were equipped with handles so a pole could be run through them and were emptied by the prisoners in the brig. There wasn't one that wasn't always overflowing.

We trained some, but not like other outfits there who were not in top shape. What I remember most was the endless round of liberty and parties in Auckland. New Zealand was in war fever. Hardly anyone you met had not lost someone in the war or had someone in it. The outcome was uncertain and no one could predict what would happen next. The New Zealanders took the attitude that they'd best enjoy what they could, while they could. We were in the same boat and the spirit fused. We were accepted into the hearts and homes of the New Zealanders 100 percent. Liberty was super. The women were super. Food and drink was plentiful, especially steak. We couldn't get enough of their steak. A big steak and chips, or steak and eggs, cost thirty cents. Unless you specified otherwise, it was fried in mutton grease. For five cents extra you got it in lard. Milk

bars abounded, and I wonder how many million gallons we consumed.

Kovacs had one of the biggest, blackest moustaches I've ever seen. When we had been approaching New Zealand someone had said he ought to shave it off.

"Hell, no. You never can tell," he'd said. "The gals might like it."

After the first liberty I walked into John's tent, and there was O'Neil, Hendershaw and Bones Turnbull making a big production over cutting off his moustache. Kovacs looked at me sheepishly and said, "They didn't go for it at all."

The New Zealanders' droll sense of humor was something else. I asked a guy on the street one night which way it was to the tram. He said, "Well, mate, you go to the first corner and if you turn left you'll be right, and if you turn right you'll be left!" and he went chuckling down the street. A New Zealander once asked me about a marine who was our mutual friend and I told him that he had been restricted for sitting on his post. He said, "I say old boy, what part of the anatomy is the post?" I'd rather hear a story from a limey or a New Zealander than anyone.

Slang words meant different things in New Zealand than in the States. Sometimes this caused mutual amusement and embarassment. I had a date with a woman who worked in a department store. I picked her up in a taxi at the store. I was shocked when she sank happily into the back seat and said, "I got screwed today, the first time in two weeks." She meant she was paid.

Another time a buddy and I were at a girl's house and they were cutting up. He said, "If you don't behave, I'll spank your fanny." There was a shocked silence. Fanny in New Zealand didn't mean your rear end--it meant female genitalia.

Knocked up meant you were tired. Many a marine's heart skipped a beat when his girlfriend said she was tired.

There were some Fifth and Eighth Marines on the island on R. and R. They wore a World War I French decoration on their shoulder called the Fourragere. It looks like a miniature fire nozzle and hose. When any woman would ask what this was, we told her it had to be worn by those with V. D. What a dirty trick!

When New Zealand servicemen had begun returning home from the Mediterranean, they were dismayed to find their women hanging around the U.S. Marines. Early on it had erupted into a riot on the main strip in Auckland, Queen Street. Eventually, the "Battle of Queen Street" settled into mostly a good-humored tension.

One night some of us went to a movie theatre to see Walt Disney's Bambi. In the middle of a movie, the New Zealanders would always have an intermission, and everyone would go out for tea. Two New Zealand soldiers were standing at the door in order to be first in line for the tea break. On the screen, Bambi was crying, "Where's my mommy? I want my mommy!"

One of the soldiers at the door piped up with, "Cheer up, bloke, she's probably out with some bloomin' Yank!" He brought down the house.

Colonel Cauldwell threw a party at a plush hotel in Auckland. He invited several of his officers and I was included. He also invited lots of women. The drinks were plentiful and free. This caused us to get in a condition that free drinks cause.

There was an Army Air Force lady lieutenant present who took all the boys' fancy. A great competition developed to take the lady home.

After the party was over, the situation deteriorated into the most comic opera fight I've ever seen. One character, Frank Railsback, was on the verge of passing out. Red Hendershaw, Ed Messer, Bob Luck and several others stood him against the building and went at each other on the sidewalk, with the distraught lady standing by. Railsback, leaning against the wall, would start to slowly sink to the ground. Immediately the fight would stop and they would rush over and yank him upright, and then resume the fight. I laughed until I was sick.

Finally, a spectator put the lady in a taxi. We left, but took a backward glance and saw the lieutenant straightened up once more, and the fight resumed. I wondered how long it went on before they discovered the object of the fight had gone home.

We had regular liberty trucks going to Auckland and they returned to camp at midnight. It seemed an impossible task to be at the terminal when they departed at midnight. Miss the truck and you found your own ride home. As a last resort you rode the morning

work train, in return for shoveling coal to feed the boilers. John O'Neil came in one morning on the train. He never was much of a drinker but this morning he was really stoned. He had to cross through an open pasture with one huge tree in the middle. He walked smack into the tree and fell to the ground, where he remained. Another guy and I went out to get him in. We slapped him around and said, "Come on, John, you've got to get out of here before the colonel sees you!"

He sat up, shook his head and said, "Well, how in the hell did I get in this woods in the first place?"

The officers had the boring and endless job of censoring the men's mail. This chore was heavy in New Zealand because conditions were more favorable and we had more time to write. I had guys in my platoon who wrote a dozen girls and fed the same line to all of them. I had to read all this because the mail was spot-checked in Hawaii, and if a letter was found to have classified information, you were in trouble. Some guys were always trying to get information through to their folks to let them know where they were, and they would get irked when you cut it out with a razor blade. One kid brought me a letter to his girl which said, "Dear Hazel," at the top and "I love you" at the bottom, and the rest of the page was neatly cut out. This

was either a censorship protest or he was tired of writing.

With the stacks of mail piled on the table, sometimes letters got back into the wrong envelopes. Not often, but mistakes do happen. A classic example of this was a letter I got from a buddy who had gone with the Eighth Marines. I ripped it open and it started out, "Dear Mother." I found out later his mother had got a letter which began, "Hello, you ornery son of a bitch."

A Jewish kid named Braun brought me a letter one day with a big Star of David printed on the paper. In the star was a block of Yiddish he had written. He assured me it was only a greeting. I took it to a Jewish friend in H. Q. It told where we had been, where we were, and where the rumors had us going. It even described the local vegetation. I neatly cut out the Star of David, enclosed a note of apology to his parents, assured them their son was well and that he was a good marine.

He was, except that he wanted to get shipped home, and it got him into some serious trouble. Besides mu mu taking its toll, we were faced with still another hazzard, malaria. We turned yellow from the pills we swallowed to combat malaria, atabrine pills. You could also use them to dye your undershirt. I heard that atabrine

was not a preventative, but only kept the symptoms of malaria from surfacing. That way, the powers-that-be could get one more campaign from an afflicted man, but he would come down with the symptoms later.

Atabrine pills were a "must" for every man. Each evening all hands lined up with an atabrine pill in one hand and a canteen cup of water in the other. The line passed before an officer, and each man popped the pill, took a swig of water, and opened his mouth wide for the officer to verify that the pill had been swallowed. I saw more tonsils in the Pacific than the entire A. M. A.

One evening an officer caught Braun trying to conceal his pill. Braun was hoping to contract malaria and get sent home. The officer had him seized and searched him. He found several more pills in a pocket. The kid hadn't had sense enough to pitch the pills each day. He dug all our holes and buried all the garbage for a month.

I ran into a familiar face one night on liberty in Auckland--the guy I had the cake fight with at Parris Island and Sea School. Oh boy, I thought, here it goes again.

"Hey, there, buddy!" he exclaimed. "How the hell you been?" He was as friendly as could be and we bought each other

drinks all night long.

Our Texan songster, Smitty, had a peculiear defect--he could pee three streams. Smitty would win betting money in Auckland by being able to write his name the most times urinating on the fences and walls outside the bars.

One night a lieutenant named Prisbee and I got a buzz on in camp and decided to get a jeep and go to Auckland. We went to the dispatcher and there was only one jeep left in camp, Colonel Cauldwell's jeep. The keys were hanging on a board, looking very forlorn.

When we left, Prisbee had the keys in his pocket.

We drove to Auckland, made the rounds, and the jeep, with the colonel's insignia on it, was saluted profusely all night.

About midnight we dropped in at an officers' club, and the first guy who saw us was Colonel Cauldwell! Because of his physical condition, Speed wasn't supposed to drink. He was with a Navy commander, an old World War I buddy, and they were feeling no pain. Speed called us right over and said to the commander, "I want you to meet a couple of my fine young officers."

The commander said to us, "Do you mean you have to serve under this old fart?"

I said, "Yes sir, I mean, no sir, that is, sir--"

Speed said, "Pay no attention to this old reprobate." And this went on all night. Prisbee and I were on pins and needles about that jeep sitting outside, but we couldn't get away.

At about two o'clock we couldn't find the commander or his driver. Speed said, "By god, you can't trust the Navy. Now how do I get home?"

Prisbee said, sheepishly, "Colonel, we have your jeep outside." We drove him back to camp. A distraught dispatcher was waiting at the gate.

"For god's sake, Colonel," he said, "we've been looking all over for that jeep."

"Well, by god, you've found it!" Speed said. This incident was never mentioned again, but the dispatcher always eyed us suspiciously when we went to him for anything.

Six weeks flew by and embarkation time came again. This time we knew we were going to hit the beach. The chips were down.

Rumor had it that we were joining the Solomon Islands Campaign. The First Marine Division had secured Guadalcanal early in 1943. In February Marine and Army units had seized the Russell Islands, just northwest of Guadalcanal. Now outfits were moving into the central Solomons, the islands of New Georgia, Rendova, and Vella Lavella. We were chipping away at the Solomons, while General Douglas MacArthur and the Army were working on New Guinea. The Allied Pacific counteroffensive was underway.

A few of our guys had gone over the hill when we had arrived at New Zealand and didn't show up until the ship was ready to leave. They would come running down the dock with a girl, and sometimes two, hanging on their arms. As the ship was easing away from the dock, ropes were even thrown to some. It was another stirring departure of wartime lovers.

I had reason to visit the bridge to make a report as we pulled away. The sailors were listening to a broadcast by "Tokyo Rose." She said, "Good morning, Third Marines. If you look at the clock on the dock you will see it is 10:30. We know where you are going. We will be waiting for you. We'll see that you have a merry Christmas." We all looked and it was 10:30. A chilling broadcast if I ever heard one.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GUADALCANAL

When we were well underway, Speed came on the intercom and told us we were going to Guadalcanal. "Ah, shit," we all groaned. That meant more blasted training! As far as the rank and file were concerned, the Third Marines were ready to hit the beach.

We landed on Guadalcanal around the first of August and immediately began intensive training as an integral part of the Third Marine Division, Reinforced. The other two regiments were the Ninth Marines and the Twenty-first Marines. We now had our own Seabees, artillery (Twelfth Marines), tanks, and everything needed to assault the beaches of the great Pacific on the long road to Japan.

Shortly after we set up on Guadalcanal, we got some good news and bad news. On August 5 the Allies conquered New Georgia Island, in the central Solomons, and seized its vital Munda Airfield. Each company in our outfit had been ordered to contribute two men to the landing force. Being on the shit list, Braun, the kid in my platoon who evaded the atabrine pills, got the call. Captain Kovacs

contributed him. We heard he was killed in an air attack on the transports on the way to New Georgia.

The training got so tough on Guadalcanal that we wondered if we would last long enough to make a division operation. All phases of jungle training were intensified--amphibious landing, jungle maneuvers, long marches, patrolling, markmanship--and the terrain was a rugged tropical wilderness. Our anti-aircraft units got plenty of practice. Rabaul, that menacing enemy fortress, sent bombers at us too often for comfort. This was a combat zone, rather a rude awakening for guys who had just spent almost two months carousing in Auckland.

One thing I got plenty of on Guadalcanal was patrol duty. Even though the Japanese had been forced to evacuate the island early in the year, there were stragglers in the hills. They were sniping and running radio sets. Some of our brass wanted them out and some didn't. We monitored their radios, which sometimes provided important information. We had to watch their movements.

Thus, our patrols were more than mere simulation. Again applying my motto, "make friends with the natives," I picked up

a Melanesian lad for a guide. We called him, "Gallant Fox," after the famous race horse, because no one could keep up with his pace.

Once on patrol Lieutenant Bristow and I were operating jointly with a patrol each, moving parallel to each other. Gallant Fox came dashing back from his usual forward position and excitedly shouted, "Snake up there who fights man!"

It was a big cobra on the path with his head raised. It sounded like a young war as everyone shot at it. No one hit it and it veered off into the jungle. Gallant Fox refused to continue because he said the snake would be angry and follow us. We went on without him, but not without every eye scanning every square inch of bush.

When I reported it I was ridiculed. I brought Gallant Fox in to testify and still was doubted. There was no such animal on the 'canal. Then Colonel Radio Smith did some research and found that the planters on the island had shipped in plants from India one time, which contained the reptile eggs.

Sergeant Murawski and I found a mangrove swamp while on patrol that always had some kind of duck-like birds on it. There were two kinds, one which was delicious when roasted, and another which was like rubber regardless of how long it was cooked. We

visited the swamp several times in our spare moments to obtain some meat.

One Sunday morning we had good luck bagging our birds and decided to explore inland. The terrain rose gradually on the inland side of the swamp, toward the hills. After about a thousand yards we came upon a former Japanese camp. The structures were all collapsed and eaten up by ants and termites. While nosing around, we spotted the corner of a weatherproofed waxed box protruding from the debris. Digging further, we found several cases of saki, cases of canned fish heads and rice and cases of canned tangerines. We sampled them all and pronounced them delicious. We inspected the premises thoroughly to make sure there was nothing of military importance; filled our packs and returned to camp with the goodies.

We shared the bounty with our buddies but never divulged the source. When the supply ran low we made another pilgrimage to the site. We had spies try to follow us on these treks, but we always shook them. Needless to say, the saki made our friendship in demand.

Once I was slated for a seventy-two hour patrol up in the interior. So far we had not located those Japanese radio teams out there. I was talking with Captain Bronson Packard about this and he said,

"You know, as long as those guys have been up there, they must be desperate for sugar and stuff. Why don't you camp, build a nice fire, leave stuff lying around, conceal four men and leave. I'll bet you have visitors."

I did just that and shortly after we left, three Japanese crept into camp. One of our boys released his safety with his finger on the trigger, fired a wild shot, and the Japanese disappeared into the jungle. We tried it twice more but had no success.

Two patrols operating together kept in contact with two-way radios, "milk bottle" radios. At a company meeting, all officers and N. C. O.'s had to choose code names to use in all situations where the enemy might hear your regular name and make use of it. Most everyone had a name they wanted. Captain Kovacs wanted "Hunkie." Lieutenant Hendershaw wanted "Hardtack." Lieutenant O'Neil was "Irish." I guess I was always a little nostalgic about my hitch of duty in Panama and talked about it too much. I couldn't come up with a code name. Murawski jumped up and said, "Hell, everyone knows he's the Panama Kid. He's been through the Big Ditch so often he could swim it." From then on I was "Panama" on the phone and radio.

Our patrols gained some notoriety and some units would send observers with us for training. On one night patrol we had a squad of Army people along. Two black men were among them. My gunnery sergeant, Curtis, was inspecting the patrol and smearing black and green grease paint on their faces. Still occupied with the guy he had just smeared, he stepped in front of one of the blacks, hand ready to smear the black paint. When he saw that black face smiling at him with a beautiful set of bright white teeth, he moved on, saying, "Soldier, don't ever smile on night patrol."

We didn't have black men in the Corps at the time, which was always a sore point with me. I had known many good black sailors. Their sense of humor and way of putting things always tickled my funnybone. Our training time was constantly interrupted by unloading supplies that were pouring in. One day I was taking a working party to the beach and we caught a ride on an Army truck driven by a black soldier. No sooner had we boarded when the air raid sirens blew. Air raids were frequent on the 'canal. The driver pulled over to the side and we debarked as prescribed. We were watching the aerial dogfight and the anti-aircraft shells bursting, when we noticed the driver lying flat in the ditch. While watching a dogfight in the past, he had been narrowly missed by a strafer.

"Come on up, soldier," I said. "They're a long way from here."

"No sir," he answered. "I used to referee those fights but no more."

At one time it seemed that most of the troops had a seige of chronic dysentery. It was serious and many became so weak that they couldn't get out of their bunks to go to the head. During one air raid, a lieutenant received the urgent call of nature and, air raid or not, by god, he was heading for the can. We got some close bombs, and he came running back yelling that he'd been hit. We checked him over and found he had a piece of shrapnel through his canteen. The warm water had run down his leg. We started kidding him and he snorted, "Well, how in hell was I to know if it was water, blood, shit or mud?"

We always had movies when the situation allowed it. On Guadalcanal they were sometimes interrupted by air raids. We would all disperse to our foxholes and the movie would resume at the all clear signal. The movies were held in a coconut grove with jungle on the back side. One time a sentry caught three Japanese who had crawled up through the jungle to watch the movie. From

the signs, they had been attending our movies for some time.

In my whole stint in the Pacific I saw only two big name entertainers, Little Jack Little and Ray Bolger. What a show they put on for us on Guadalcanal! Nowadays it would be "X-rated" but at least it wasn't a mixed audience. Seemed to us there wasn't a woman within a thousand miles. What I remember best were the shows put on by the guys in all branches of the service, all done on their own time. There were a multitude of amateur actors, musicians and such in the war. These shows were as sharp as anything you'd pay to see in the States, and we got them free.

Bristow always wants to go fishing. He and I had a dandy fishing trip on the 'canal. It was in the Balesuna River about three miles from camp. Our gear was camouflage nets, grenades and sticks. We took several guys and Gallant Fox, who would pick out the poison fish from the catch.

We gathered at the river and most of us went upstream after stretching the nets across the water. We waded down beating the water with the sticks. When we reached the nets they were bulging with fish. We lobbed in the grenades, strung the fish on long bamboo poles and headed for camp. Never will I forget the sight of all those poles full of fish as we went across the grass fields. We had enough

to feed Bristow's company and mine, plus all Gallant Fox could carry away to his village.

Fresh meat on the island was nil. We all yearned for fresh steak, pork chops or anything not from a can. There was a herd of cattle on our part of the island that had belonged to the English before the war. They were strictly taboo. No one was to even think about those steaks on the hoof. One day I was firing a 60mm mortar problem from one hill to another. The cattle were grazing in a field below us. I was looking through my field glasses, adjusting the bursts to get on the target. On the fins of the mortar shell you can place powder sheafs, called increments, to give extra range. I ordered four increments on the next round, and it fell smack in the middle of that cattle herd. I walked over to the gun and there laid the increments on the ground. The gunner looked at me devilishly and said, "By gosh, those increments must have fallen off."

Well, it was done and there was no use wasting that beef. Two were dead and two were wounded and had to be dispatched. We called H.Q. and they picked them up in a truck. The steaks were well worth the ass-chewing and the ream of reports I had to fill out.

One time I had my platoon out in the hills and they were in a particularly grab-assy mood. I put up with this skylarking as long

as my temper permitted and then lit into them. As the harangue progressed, I got angrier and finally said, "If any of you people think you can whip me, just step out!" Didn't that damn Arabasz step out?

We went at it but I couldn't seem to hurt that tough S. O. B., and he seemed to enjoy it. I pounded him and he pounded me. I suspected he was holding back. Finally, he threw up his hands and said, "That's it, I've had enough." When no one was looking, the ornery devil grinned and winked at me. Under the awed stares of my platoon, I walked down to a stream and washed my bloody face.

One of my replacements on Guadalcanal was Private Watson. Watson was a pain in the ass. He was so anxious to help that I couldn't look up without seeing his expectant smiling faceful of teeth. Once I offhandedly mentioned I'd like to have my own .45 pistol instead of the carbine I'd been issued on New Zealand. Two days later Watson handed me a brand new .45, made from spare parts he had begged, borrowed and stolen all over the island.

"Well, Watson," I said, "maybe you can get me three new 60mm mortars." I had been trying to replace my three old dilapidated mortars for months. The next evening he delivered three new mortars still packed in their cosmoline.

"Where in hell did you get these?" I asked.

He said, "I traded six cases of beer for them."

"Where in hell did you get six cases of beer?"

"Found it on the dock."

Next he procured me three 30 caliber aircraft machine guns and made tripods for them, and we used them. Hey, this guy wasn't such a pain after all. He was kept busy procuring for the rest of my time in the Third. But he was forever regaling us with stories of his exploits in the Canadian Air Force and the many decorations he had, until we were ready to scream. He said he'd been awarded the "Order of the Garter." Nobody had ever heard of it, and who the hell would award something with a name like that? We decided he was crazy.

It seems promotions never come when you're overseas. We never had our quota of N.C.O.'s. During the preceding months, I had plenty of time to note the natural leaders and came to know their backgrounds and talents. On the 'canal the rates finally came through. I submitted my list to the C.O. He hit the ceiling. "What the hell is this, the platoon roster?" He went down the list. This guy can't spell. This guy drinks too much, this, that and the other. I stuck to my guns and I got what I wanted, good leaders, combat leaders.

Speed Cauldwell was promoted to brigadier general and was moved to division H. Q., but his heart was with his old Third Regiment. I think he spent more time with us than at H. Q. Colonel George McHenry was given command of our regiment. At the same time, Major General Allen Turnage took command of the division.

Bristow and I had developed a snap-shooting technique, shooting from the hip, while on Samoa. This deviated from the manual and caused great concern among the "bookies." Regardless, we set up a regular course on the 'canal, with silhouette targets popping up, and we could get a magazine full of ammo off before you could blink. It was very impressive. One day Murawski was with me on a demonstration. Ski would often crack on my leaving the enlisted ranks to become an officer. When he introduced me to the group he said, "This is Lieutenant Marbaugh. He is an officer and a gentleman." After a short pause he said, "And he has a paper to prove it." Now that I think of it, a man should have some proof.

I ran across an old top sergeant on the 'canal whom I had known when he was a buck sergeant and I was a P. F. C. When he saw the bars on my shoulders he said, "Congratulations, Ram, now you are one of the two most dangerous men in the Marine Corps."

"Oh?" I said. "How is that?"

He said, "One is a boot with a .45 pistol and the other is a second lieutenant with a fountain pen."

When lecturing troops it's not a bad idea to open with a joke, to let them think you're not a prick, even if you are. Gunnery Sergeant Wiggins always broke me up with his self-introduction. "Gentlemen," he would say, "my name is Sergeant Wiggins. I am a marine of the old school. My blood is on the--(long pause)--on the brass rail at Kelley's bar."

One day I received word that Gallant Fox had been fooling with some gasoline, set himself afire and had been severely burned. The natives wouldn't let the Navy doctors touch him and had taken him to the village. I made a trip up there immediately. He had only one leg burned but it was pretty bad. They had burned a pile of old G.I. shoes and were smearing the ashes on his leg. I beat it back to our doctor and asked him to try to do something before they ruined Gallant Fox. He replied, "Well, let's just simmer down. What do they use to make leather? It's tannic acid and tannic acid is used to treat burns. Those ashes should be rich in tannic acid. Anyway, I can't do a thing unless the natives ask."

The next time I visited Gallant Fox, his leg had been encased in a coconut-frond cast, poured full of something that looked like lard.

The last time I saw him was shortly before we left the 'canal. He was as good as new with hardly any scars. Wisdom is where you find it.

Our feet were of great concern to everyone on the 'canal. They were constantly wet from stream-crossing exercises and got sore and ulcerated between the toes and on the bottoms and heels. Although concerned, no one ever seemed to do much except inspect them. One day I was in a catankerous mood, when at a company formation Kovacs ordered all platoon leaders to inspect the platoons' feet. I didn't react quick enough to suit him and he said, "Lieutenant Marbow," (as he always called me) "that means you, too."

I couldn't resist retorting, "Yes sir, shall I do it now or wait till they grow back?" That broke the platoon up.

While on the 'canal I developed white spots on my skin and ear trouble in my busted ear. The Navy doctor diagnosed it as live coral under the skin and behind my ear drum. He said there was no cure and I probably would be deaf. One day I ran into a raggedy, old, Melanesian man out in the jungle. I started to talk pidgin English to him and he said, "I say, young man, you needn't talk that way to me." He was a graduate from the University of Hawaii. He

looked at my spotted neck and said, "That's live coral. If you get a four percent solution of photographer's hypo and apply it several times a day, it will fix it."

"What about my ear?"

"Drop it in there, too."

I scrounged up some solution and followed his directions. It cured everything and I've never been bothered since. As I said, high society doesn't have a monopoly on wisdom.

Lieutenant Bristow was chosen to head up an amphibous patrol on the Japanese-held Treasury Island. Under the noses of the enemy, he was landed by rubber boat from a sub and spent several days charting the island, counting troops and playing a deadly game of hide and seek. The Japanese knew he was there.

Upon leaving the island they inflated a hidden boat and paddled to the rendevous area to meet the sub. The moon was due to rise and the rendevous had to be before that. The sub was late, as it was playing tag with an enemy destroyer. The destroyer barreled past the rubber boat close enough to almost overturn it. Finally, just as the moon rose, the sub surfaced within a stone's throw of them.

The patrol scrambled aboard, and Bristow lived to relate the whole story to me on Guadalcanal and laugh at the frantic efforts of the Japanese to find him. He said that they even had sent word with a native to him, suggesting surrender in return for good treatment. He received the Navy Letter of Commendation Medal for this escapade.

While on the 'canal we had very little spare time, but six of us in our company liked to play basketball. We built a real nice court in a grass field right out in the hot sun. Pretty soon we were challenging other companies. What a team we had. The other five guys were college players and they were good. I coached and subbed to rest them. More interest developed and the betting was fierce. No one had any place to spend their money anyway. All the other teams built their courts under the coconut palms in the shade.

As time went on, Johnny Monks and other promoter-like characters organized an island tournament. This included Army, Marine, Navy, Air Corps and Seabee units. For trophies the Seabees made beautiful plaques out of downed Japanese aircraft and fine ebony wood. Our team swept opponent after opponent right up to the finals.

We played the championship game on our court, as it was the best one and had more room for spectators. The other finalist was another Marine team from H.Q. A throng encircled that court and

money was piled on the ground outside the boundaries on all four sides. We were accustomed to playing out there under that blistering sun, while the other team was used to their shaded court. We outlasted them with a last-minute finish. The score was tied with a few seconds left. An opportunity opened and I sank one and was fouled, and made the foul. We ended up winning by one point.

After the game a captain congratulated our team and said he'd lost a bundle. I recognized him as the captain in charge of our train when we had left New River, North Carolina--Bert Simpson. We hadn't seen each other since. As he shook hands with me, he suddenly did a doubletake and exclaimed, "It's no damn wonder I lost my money. You're that drunken damn sergeant!"

Captain Kovacs was exuberant. His company were the champs and he couldn't stop talking about it. He was continually striving to make his company the best in the world, and to make sure the world knew it by searching for ways to distinguish it from others. Shortly after we had arrived on the 'canal, he'd held a company officers meeting, where it was suggested that all the company officers grow moustaches. "Okay, gentlemen, then it's agreed that we all grow moustaches," Kovacs had said. "Any questions?"

Our peach-fuzzed second lieutenant, Luke Morris, spoke up and said, "Yes sir. What color, sir?" We all cracked up.

Johnny Monks was in the forefront of just about every activity of the Third Marines. Hardly an event was staged that he didn't have a big hand in the organization and planning. He M.C.'d more shows, boxing tournaments and such than Howard Cosell. I can still see him up on a stage, pointing a finger at a marine who had just answered some ridiculous quiz question to win a twenty-five dollar war bond, and shouting, "Give that man a bond!" He was a great tension-breaker, and his wit and humor came to the rescue in many a hairy situation.

Major John Alden Scott was a talented, handsome man, who acted as adjutant at battalion formations, relaying the commands from the C.O. His voice could shake the dew from the trees. He had the knack of always being where he was needed and always had a joke or word of encouragement for the troops. He would have three successful careers in his time, the Corps, politics, and publishing, where he became president of the Gannett Newspaper chain.

Our battalion commander, old Lieutenant Colonel Ralph King, was a former enlisted man, with little formal education. He was self-educated and had pulled himself up in the world. He wasn't too well thought of by the Kentucky boys, because early in his career he had commanded a National Guard outfit that had intervened in a violent coal miners strike in Kentucky. He had false teeth and always had a corncob pipe clamped in them. This interfered some with his speech and, coupled with his self-determined pronunciation and poor grammar, sometimes tickled our funnybones. Some guys kept a book on the Colonel's quotes, called "Kingisms."

My buddy, Wee Willie Wilson, was a big, handsome guy, with jet black eyes that would snap and sparkle at the very mention of action. He commanded a rifle platoon. I think Willie was a born killer. His background surely indicated such, but I won't go into that.

Like Bristow, Captain Harold "Windy" Swain had joined us on Samoa, where he also had been with the small contingent of marines who had led the native Samoan Marines, the island's only defense before we'd arrived. Windy was a "good ol' boy" Southerner who

looked and talked like Tennessee Ernie Ford. For every situation he had a cornpone metaphor. If we ran into a particularly tough problem, Windy would say, "Looks like we plowed up a snake this time." Someone who wasn't doing his job was "useless as the foreskin on a monkey's meat."

Captain Bert Simpson seemed older than the rest of us, a serious and dedicated man, but not a professional. He was the man you would go to for advice on things you wouldn't mention to your ma and pa.

If you have to go to war, you'd best be represented by men like those in the old Third Marines. We could be out in the jungle at night and a company commander could send word back to the rear of his column for a candy bar, and it would be passed up and unwrapped without a sound.

One evening, toward the end of our stint on the 'canal, I was assigned to take a thirty-man working party to the beach. We had worked like dogs from the crack of dawn. There were no trucks available, so we marched three miles to the beach. There were some epithets that would parch your eardrums.

Out in the harbor was a big ship, the William Penn. A fleet of Higgins boats were enroute from the ship to the beach, unloading Army troops. AND SOME 1ST MARINES.

Suddenly, from the direction of Tulagi Island, two Japanese torpedo planes bore down on the ship, very low to the water. All hell broke loose from the beach and the ship. Both planes were shot down, but one got a torpedo into the William Penn. The other plane misjudged, dropped his torpedo between the ship and us, and it went right by us and came to rest at the edge of the jungle without exploding.

It was getting dark, so we assisted the troops out of the Higgins boats and directed them to their assembly area. The William Penn was on fire and there were explosions on her. She burned in the harbor for days before they could tow her out to sea and sink her. Our prime movers for our newly-acquired "Long-Tom" artillery went down with that ship.

Finally, we received word we were leaving Guadalcanal. Ski and I took Gallant Fox and some of his friends on our last pilgrimage to the abandoned Japanese camp. They cleaned up the remaining food, while Ski and I carted off the rest of the saki.

We loaded aboard transports for one big final rehearsal in the New Hebrides Islands. After a week of practice there, we loaded up again and headed for the northern Solomons.

Munda Airfield was in full operation. That would provide our air support. A Navy fleet was bombarding various enemy bases in the northern Solomons. That would soften them up for us. New Zealand Troops had just landed up there, seizing the Treasury Islands. That was to protect our flank as we steamed by. Marines had just taken Choiseul Island. That was a diversion, to draw Tojo's eye away from the big trick we had up our sleeve.

The Third Marine Division, Reinforced, was about to ram Bougainville Island, 100 miles deep in Japanese territory.