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"THE BATTLE FOR SAIPAN"

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It was about 11 o'clock, the next morning was D-day, and usually most of us would sleep on top side as below the heat was too great to get a decent nights sleep. We all were excited as we know Saipan wasn't very many miles from our convoy. Then general quarters sounded, the sailors started to man their stations, when we marines scrambled below. Later I and my buddy overheard a sailor say a Jap plane was sighted, about 7 miles from us, but evidently had high tailed it back. We came out on deck again after the all clear and climbed on one of the hatches to see if we could spot the island. All of a sudden there was a big red glare directly in front of our ship, and we knew then that the task force was already there blasting hell out of Saipan. We watched the glare and expolsions for a couple of hours and then we decided to crawl under a Higgins boat for a few hours sleep. Chow was sounded at 5 o'clock D-day morning but very few felt like eating anything as the excitement affected our stomachs with a hollow feeling. After drinking a cup of coffee I went down to our compartment to get my pack and gear ready. The equipment we had to take with us was enough to give any mule a backache but all of it was essential so we put it on, making the already cramped quarters more impossible to move about. Finally after about what seemed like hours, the order over the public address system blaired into our ears, "ALL MARINES PREPARE TO DISEMBARK". With much struggle, we managed to get through the small passageways to the deck and to our stations for disembarking. Our Lt. gave us the word to go over the side, down the cargo net and into the boat. After our Higgins boat pulled away from the ship each wave of boats rendezvoused in a small circle, and then we headed for shore. We all laughed and joked on the way in, but behind all those laughing faces, was another face, a face that was thinking of home, praying that God would spare his life and protect him for what was to come those next days in combat. About half way in we transferred to water buffloes which would carry us across the coral that surrounded the island. These water tractors are much smaller than a Higgins boat so half of our platoon went in one and half in another. Now most of us didn't say much, only stretching over the side to get a look at the already burning island. Our destroyers and cruisers were quite near to the shore, setting broadside, blasting all guns at the beach. Our regiment was to be the assult troops and our battalion was to be the last of the assult troops in. As all battles are, things got fouled up one way or the other, and we were sent in three waves ahead of time. We watched the two waves ahead of us, and they'd get almost to the beach, then the Japs opened up with mortar and artillery fire. The tractor we were in had been to the beach already so I asked the driver just how much of a beach head we had, and he said about 200 yards or so but wasn't sure becaus that he didn't stay long



on the beach because the artillery fire was too heavy. Well, this was the last lap and our wave headed for the beach at top speed hitting the coral reef's every now and then, only to lurch forward again in the smoother water. We all were down in the tractor now keeping low as a stray bullet might come our way. We finally hit the beach, the front of the tractor latched in the air, and then the tracts dug into the sand and you could feel the ground under you. The driver stopped the tractor and our Lt. gave the order to go over the side. Those tractors are quite high, and with all our gear and rifles etc., the jump sent us knee deep in the soft sand. Other marines were already dug in, waiting to organize and go to the front lines which we found out later were a couple hundred yards past the airstrip. We could see artillery shells hitting further down the beach and our Lt. gave the order to dig in and wait for the rest of our platoon to come in, as for some reason weren't with our wave of tractors. The sand was soft and we took our shovels off our backs and started to dig foxholes. I had mine dug, and crawled into it, when the rest of our platoon came in and our Lt. told them to dig in too. But the tractors of their wave drew artillery fire, and a barrage of fire hurled in on us and then one shell landed smack in the middle of all of us. After it was over, I looked out of my foxhole to find our Lt. and five other marines were hit. The marine in the next foxhole to me was laying motionless on top of the sand he had dug from his foxhole and I figured he must be dead. Our Lt. was hit in the leg, and the other marines that didn't have time to dig themselves a foxhole were hit in the back, as they laid out in the open on their stomachs. Then I heard a groan, and looked to find the marine next to me wasn't dead after all. So I asked him what I could do for him and he said to take his pack off for him. This I did, but while pulling the pack off I noticed his arm only hung by some bloody flesh above his elbow. I called for a corpsman, and two of them came up with a stretcher and took him away. I learned that later, he, and our Lt. and three other marines from our platoon died aboard ship while being treated. After the wounded were taken away, we decided to go down the beach to the airstrip and try to find the rest of our company. We passed a tractor that was knocked out, its ammunition exploding in bursts now and then, so we steered clear of that, not wanting to get hit with a flying fragment. We had gone quite a distance, when we heard the whistle of an artillery shell, and we all jumped into abandoned foxholes to take cover. When we looked up again, somebody yelled a Jap was hiding in a pillbox some 10 or 15 ft. ahead of us. With that the Jap came out of the pillbox with his hands above his head, and in his left hand was a bunch of papers. I yanked at my rifle only to find a piece of shrapnel hit the wooden stock, making the bolt jammed, and after many futile attempts, gave it up as being useless to try anymore. You could see other marines trying to get their sand filled rifles to work too. Just then a marine officer came up, and he ordered two marines to take the Jap as prisoner. I was then more interested in finding a rifle for myself and I picked a few up near by that were once dead or wounded marines'. I finally found one in good condition to use. We left that place and while walking down the beach a bit further we met



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a marine that said our company was just across the airstrip, and pointed to the direction we could find them. We started across the open airstrip, and about in the middle of it, bullets whined past us, most likely a couple of snipers were up in the trees that lined the field. We ran at high port for all we were worth, and after taking cover in the trees on the other side we felt more safe. We were getting close to the front lines now as you could hear the chattering of our machine guns and rifle fire. While we were passing under the trees we ran into two Japs, one with a knife still stuck in his stomach, and the other one had evidently been shot down by a BAR as he was almost cut in half from the bullets. We just looked at that for a second as we were anxious to get with our company. As we traveled closer to the lines, we met wounded marines coming back, one helping the other, and we asked them where our company was but they were too dazed and shocked to answer us. We went on and after asking a number of marines, we finally located our company and platoon. The first thing any of us asked was where was this fella from our platoon, was this one killed, who last saw so and so, and it was sickening as when you heard of a friend of yours being dead plus all the rest of the confusion, you couldn't make yourself realize anything in your already dulled mind. I am not afraid or disgraced to say I was scared but probably due to tradition and training something kept you going and the more you saw the madder you'd get. Night was coming now, so we set up a defense line and dug foxholes. We took off all our gear, laying it on the sides of the foxholes, and although none of us had eaten all day, we only chewed on a piece of D-rations (bar of candy) and drank water. There was two of us to a foxhole and we had it so arranged that one fella would sleep for two hours while the other one kept watch. That night I don't think either us or the Japs sleep, as they threw all their artillery and their heavy mortar fire at us, and I'll never forget the shells whistling through the air, some landing only a few feet from us. During the night a Jap got through our lines somehow, and ran right through all of us, and we were afraid to fire at him as we might hit one of our own men. We listened to hear other marines shot for him to halt down the line and evidently he got into clear range as you could hear rifle fire. All that first night I don't believe we closed our eyes to sleep as the artillery shells fired from the hills kept us awake. The next morning we put on our gear, and started to advance toward a swamp area that preceded the hills in front of us. We ran into Jap machine gun nests that were hidden in the swamp, holding us up most of that day, while our mortar men tried to knock them out. That second night we set up a line of defense along the swamp. We all wondered how we'd get through the swamp, but being so dog tired we let it go at that, knowing that the next day we'd find a way. But the Japs were planning things too, as we awoke the next day to find them counterattacking. They came at us through the swamp in small dug out boats, with machine guns mounted on the front of them. We had a good line of defense set up with machine guns every few feet, and BAR men and rifle men in between. We cut them down each time they appeared from the swamp, and the ones we only wounded finished them-



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selves off with their own hand grenades. I'm not sure but I think we spent another night there at the swamp. We got the word to move out into the swamp and we started through it, going up to our waists in muck and water. We got to the other side without firing a shot or a shot fired at us. We passed a deserted farm house, the only occupants were the chickens and goats that wandered in and out of the house as if it were a barn. Advancing further on, we passed through a sugar cane field and came out into the open where another farm house stood. There laying next to the door was a dead Jap soldier, probably dead for a couple of days from our artillery and mortar fire. We started to go passed the house when a bullet whinned passed us, we hit the deck and waited for a few minutes. Then getting up, we ran for all we were worth across the open field into another patch of sugar cane. Slowly and cautiously we combed through the sugar field in a skirmish line coming to another open field where probably were planted some kind of vegetable. We ran across this coming to the edge of hill 500 which later was called shrapnel hill. There embeded in the hill was a mine of some sort, a railroad track with a few small cars ran into it and a small house and water well stood near by. We also found an abandoned Jap girl about 3 or 4 years old, sitting alone playing with a little green apple she found somewhere. We sat on the side of the hill resting and gave the half starved kid a bar of candy and water from our canteens. Later someone took her back to the rear area that's the last we saw of her. After an hour of rest we started up the hill passing a dead Jap girl of about 15 years old, blown apart from our artillery fire as there was evidence of blown up earth and stones all around her. We advanced to the top of the hill, getting sniped at from another ridge overlooking the hill we were on. That night we dug foxholes along the edge on the other side of the hill. We stayed there at this spot for four days, waiting for the 4th Division to swing around and join our line. Every night we would use grenades to throw over the side of the hill at noises that sounded like Japs crawling up on us. One night a Jap tried to get through our line about four foxholes down from where I was, only to be cut down by a corporal from our platoon. The corporal told us the next day that he saw the Jap crawling up on their foxhole while one of our flares lit up the area in front of us. He picked up his BAR and fired the whole magazine of ammunition at him, the Jap fell, and said in plain English, "No more, that's all". We finally received orders to pack up our gear and get ready to move out. We advanced in columns, each man about 5 ft. apart from one another. As we walked along we passed Jap artillery guns that were knocked out by naval gun fire, as big shell holes deep as 10 to 15 ft. were all over that area. Going on further we came upon a coconut grove where another battalion was setting up for the night. We passed them and went down a little ways where we set up and dug in for the night. The front lines now were a few hundred yards in front of us but we kept watches all night just the same for security sake. Being now in reserve we were mop up patrol troops for the already advanced troops ahead of us. That next morning we started out a platoon at a time, and each platoon had its



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area to cover. It was tough going that day due to the jungle terrain plus looking behind each tree and bush for those yellow monkeys. We didn't run into any Japs that day and set up for the night behind the front lines which had advanced two or three miles that day. The following day we still were in reserve following up giving aid to the front line by carrying water and ammo up to them. The next day we filled in a gap in the front lines and stayed with them from then on. It was then that we set up for the night on the edge of a cliff, overlooking an open field. Myself and foxhole buddy were just starting to dig a foxhole. I was getting my pack and rifle off, started to take a look at my rifle to clean and put a few drops of oil in it for the night. All of a sudden there was a terrific explosion about 5 ft. from us. I felt something hit me behind my left ear, and I lost all control of myself, like being in a whirlpool of some kind, going around and around. What happened was a mortar shell hit only a few feet away and the whirlpool feeling I got was the concussion. The thing that hit me behind the ear was a small piece of shrapnel. I got to my feet and found myself bleeding like a pig. My foxhole buddy lay next to me, holding his stomach, which was covered with blood and he lay next to me and kept saying, "Oh, my God, I'm hit in the stomach". I now started to feel weak and a couple of fellas from our platoon came to us and told me to lay down while they bandaged my head. A couple of corpsmen came up and finished bandaging us two while the others looked where the mortar shell hit. It landed smack in the middle of five marines who were digging a foxhole, blowing them apart beyond recognition. A couple of stretcher bearers came up and the two of us that were wounded were taken down to a jeep and evacuated to the beach hospital. On the way down we stopped at a first aid station. There they gave us blood plasma and worked mostly on my foxhole buddy but he died a few minutes after we were there. An ambulance jeep was waiting and I was taken down to the hospital on the beach where we first landed 15 days ago. At the beach hospital the doctor put a stitch in my head wound and after my clothes were removed we found a piece of shrapnel grazed my left arm too. A corpsman dressed this other wound and I was carried to a tent ward which had been set up for the wounded. For three days I felt weak from loss of blood but on the fourth day I got out of bed and walked around to get my strength back. The wounds healed up fast and after the 6th day in the hospital I returned to my company. All the marine outfits had reached their objectives and had returned to the beach area and set up camp. When I located my platoon the fellas were surprised to see me, as someone had come back from the beach with the news that I had died at the beach hospital. It was evidently someone that didn't know me very well and had me mixed up with another marine. The entire island was secured except for a small portion at one end of the island where the Army was finishing the battle. A day or so after that I was back with my outfit, we received word over the company radio that 100 Japs broke through the Army's line and they needed help. We packed up our tents and that afternoon we rode in trucks to the front lines at the end of the island. The Japs had pulled a good attack all right, as a battalion of soldiers were

pushed back quite a ways and some had to retreat into the ocean. They were picked up later from coral reefs that they had swam to by small naval crafts that were patrolling that area. When we arrived at the spot where the Japs broke through, we organized, making a skirmish line, with light and heavy tanks in between us. The tanks lunched slowly forward, all their machine guns chattering as we walked slowly forward with them. There was a big ditch the Japs were hiding in, and when we came upon it, our tanks let them have it with the 27mm guns. Looking into the ditch a while later, we saw dead Japs piled two and three high, just as they had fallen. We went on, and now and then we ran into snipers which were quickly cut down. We advanced into a coconut grove and from a stray bullet a Jap ammo dump caught on fire and every 5 or 10 minutes it would explode. We had to pass it to continue on to our objective so after what we thought was the last of the explosions we hurried on. We were only about 15 ft. from it when the damn thing blew up again. We all ducked automatically but a burning piece flew only inches passed myself and the marine next to me. Keeping going in a long skirmish line, we swung around and headed for the beach, our last objective. There was a railroad track we had to pass over, then from there on to the ocean it was open terrain. The beach and ocean was in full view now, as we were on the higher ground. There was another Jap ammo dump near the beach and it too caught on fire and started exploding. We kept our eyes on the beach and all of a sudden we saw three Japs running down it. I don't think there wasn't one of us that didn't fire at them. Our tanks lunched slowly forward again, as we followed along side. We got to the beach and found the Japs had dug hideouts in the banks of the beach. A few of us covered each hole in the bank, firing into them with our rifles. The one I was firing in we heard an explosion of a Jap hand grenade. Evidently the Jap in there knew he had no choice in the matter. Some of the Japs swam out to the coral reefs right off the beach, and our tanks sprayed them with machine gun fire. The Army did a good job at this spot as dead Japs littered the beach and some were floating on the water near the shore. We received orders an hour or so later to dig in there on the beach for the night. The ammo dump exploded now and then and we all got behind trees or hit the deck each time it did. I dug in with a marine that night who carried a BAR. As always, we kept two hour watches in each foxhole. About 12 o'clock it was my turn to go on watch, while the marine I was with got a couple hours sleep. The mortar platoon behind us kept throwing flares up every few minutes. A flare lit up in the sky and I watched the shore line. Within a seconds time, I saw two Japs creeping down the beach. I picked up my friends BAR and fired a whole magazine of ammo at them. I didn't sleep the remainder of that night thinking that if there were Japs out in front of us I wouldn't want to get my throat cut while sleeping. The next morning we got out of our foxhole and went down to the beach to see if I got the two Japs I fired at that night. It was hard to tell, as when we got to that area the day before, dead Japs were already scattered all over the place. But under a piece of tin a wounded Jap was laying and we slowly approached



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him. We got within a few feet from him when he raised up and hauled off with a grenade at us. It was a dud and didn't explode. We both fired at him, sending him back to his ancestors. We stayed at the beach there for a couple of days and then we got word that the island was officially secured. We then returned to our old camp area near the beach hospital. The battle for Saipan was over, new replacements of marines were coming in to take the places of marines that fell in action. Another island taken, but our job wasn't done yet, for after a few days rest, we were scheduled to make another landing, the island of TINIAN.



"THE BATTLE FOR TINIAN"

For about an hour or so there the islands were out of sight completely. After much anxious waiting we arrived on the far side of Tinian. Our new Lt. called us together on top side and explained to us what we were to do in the fake landing that we were to pull on the Japs. The higgins boats were to pull up along side of the transports and we were to assimilate going up and down the cargo nets to give the appearance, if the Japs were watching us through field glasses, that troops were going in to make an assault landing. We carried this all through, and when the signal was given the higgins boats headed for shore. In the meantime, while all this was happening, our destroyers were in close to the shore blasting all guns at the island. It was like watching the whole landing operation from a balcony seat, as our transports were close enough to give us a good view yet not in the range of fire. As we watched, the Japs were answering to the destroyers guns, and this one particular destroyer was getting a barrage of Jap coastal gun fire. You could see the shells landing all around the ship, sending spouts of water in high columns where they landed in the water. The Japs finally got the destroyers range, and one shell landed on its fantail. The destroyer was on fire, and to get out of their range of gun fire, she pulled out down the coast. Still smoke came from its fantail, but most likely the crew on board didn't like the idea of the Japs scoring a hit on them, and the destroyer swung around broadside and let all their guns go at the Japs. All the marines and sailors aboard our transport yelled and applauded like you hear at a ball game when someone makes a home run. By this time the higgins boats were in close to the shore, but some of them never did get back to the transports, as the Japs put a barrage of gun fire down when they were within their range. While this fake landing was going on, the 4th Division was landing on the other side of Tinian. They sent in demolition men first who blasted an opening along the coral cliffs for troops and tanks to get ashore. Our higgins boats returned to the ships and we pulled out again to await orders for our division to land where the 4th Division went in. It was about 8 o'clock that night, the sun had gone down, and it was dusk when the order over the public address system blaired out to prepare to disembark. We went all the way in to the shore in higgins boats, and when we set foot on shore the 4th division had met their objective for the day, a half circle of about a mile of Tinian's coast. We moved in and filled in a gap on the front lines. It was pitch dark by the time we arrived at that point, and we started to dig foxholes for the night. It took us hours to get below the earth's surface, as the island was mostly of hard coral. There hadn't been any artillery fire from the time we landed, so we gave up digging our foxholes any deeper, thinking that it wasn't necessary. We settled down to our shallow foxholes for the night with the assurance that Tinian was going to be a push over compared to Saipan. It was around 1 o'clock that next morning we all definitely changed our minds. The Japs opened up with artillery and mortar fire,



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shells landing all over our area. Without a word from anyone, we grabbed for our picks and shovels, and the once hard coral bed we were laying on wasn't such a job after all, and the dirt and coral came flying out of them as we dug for deeper and safer foxholes. The night air was cool, but you wouldn't believe it to see us sweat while we lay there crouched in our foxholes, hoping and praying that a shell wouldn't land on us. We were battle wise from the terrific shelling we witnessed on Saipan, but artillery was our worst moral builder, you couldn't do anything about it except to lay there and take it. As dawn came, the artillery let up, and by the time it was light out it had completely ceased. We got out of our foxholes to walk around and stretch, when a Jap machine gun opened up on us from a nearby sugar cane field. It was like saying "Good Morning, Boys, we're still here." We dove for cover in our foxholes. A while later we put on our gear, and shoved off back to the coast, where we replaced a company of marines who had been holding that position since they landed the day before. The Jap machine gun that fired on us earlier in the morning didn't bother us when we moved out, most likely they took off and changed their position. After we relieved this other company of marines, we had tanks come up and they moved out in front of us, as we advanced down along the coast. Without meeting any opposition that day, we swung around and headed inland, following up in reserve for the next four days, covering every inch of the terrain that had already been taken by the advanced troops ahead of us. Then on the seventh day that we had been on Tinian we were put on the front lines. We started out early that morning with tanks again in front of us, their machine guns chattering away. Tinian had a number of sugar cane fields on it, and you could only see a few feet in front of you as we advanced through them. About 4 o'clock that day we were almost to our objective, that being this ridge about 100 ft. high. Our tanks couldn't go with us so we went on up the ridge without them. When we got to the top of it, there were two Jap coastal guns that were knocked out, big shell holes being all over the area. We kept right on going across the top of the ridge when the Japs opened fire on us with machine gun and rifle fire. We hit the deck and let them have a taste of some of our lead. Bullets whined passed me as I lay there firing and some kicked up dirt only inches from me. My corporal was a few yards behind me and I heard him cry out. I turned around to see him rolling over and over again on the ground, his whole chest covered with blood. He just kept yelling and I turned around to see Japs coming out of a sugar cane field at us. A machine gun opened up to my right and I kept firing at those Japs who were edging up on us. The dirt started to kick up around me again so I took off for a shell hole to take cover. I was right on the edge of it when I felt this burning sensation going through my hip, and the force of the bullet threw me into the shell hole. There were two other marines in this hole, one had been shot through the hand. The other marine took out his knife and ripped my pants leg open, and took my first aid pouch off my belt and bandaged the wound in my hip. The blood poured out and I felt myself black out every few minutes. I held the bandage close to the wound to stop the bleeding. The marine that wasn't wounded said he'd make a run for it and see if he could get a corpsman. He ran to a shell hole behind us but he yelled to me that there wasn't a corpsman



that wasn't busy. I was now out in the front line, as the rest of my company moved back to take cover in shell holes, and the Japs and Marines were firing over the shell hole I was in. I told this other marine that he should make a run for it, as he was bleeding a lot too. After he left I took off all my equipment and waited for a chance to crawl back myself. I waited till it was dark as I'd have a better chance than trying to drag myself back in day light. The firing let up and it was dark now and I started out. I crawled on my hands and one knee, dragging my other leg, although I couldn't do much else, as my leg had gone numb. A couple of fellas from my platoon saw me coming and yelled for me to crawl over to where they were. When I got there they reached out and pulled me in the shell hole. There was a marine there from our platoon with a walkie talkie and he radioed back for stretcher bearers to take me out. When they arrived I was put on the stretcher and taken down to a jeep, which evacuated me to the beach hospital. This time I knew that my fighting days were over, and I was taken off the island by plane and evacuated to Saipan. There I stayed for two days, a splint was put on my leg, and after they took x-rays and found my leg broken, I was evacuated again by plane to the Marshall Island. I was there for four days resting up and then on another plane which took me to Guadalcanal Naval Hospital. They set my leg and put me in a plaster cast and two weeks later an Army ship arrived and I was taken back to the United States. When we docked in San Francisco, a band played for us as we were taken off the ship and put in awaiting ambulances. My first hospital in the States was Oakland Naval Hospital. As soon as I was assigned to a ward, I asked for a pencil and paper, and I wrote out a telegram to Mother and Dad. The next day I received an answer from them saying that they were overjoyed with the news of my return to this country. The Elizabeth Journal carried the story of what happened to me those last few months. An old school friend of mine by the name of Helen Scharff, who was in the WAVES was stationed at that time in the Oakland Naval Supply Base, and read of my being in Oakland Hospital. Helen contacted me and for the three months that I was there in California, she and another WAVE, Jane Snider, visited me twice or more a week. I shall always be indebted to them for making the road to recovery an easy one for me. The Navy Department put out an order which stated that anyone wounded overseas would be sent to a hospital near their home. I was transferred on Thanksgiving Day from the West Coast there to the St. Albans Naval Hospital, Long Island, New York. Since then I've come a long way in recovery, from wheelchair to crutches, a cane for awhile, till now where I am going around unaided. I was then transferred to the Sea Gate Convalescent Hospital on Coney Island, New York, where a rehabilitation program is given to further our progress of recovery. A medical discharge awaits me, and after three years and these remaining months in the Marine Corps, I shall return to civilian life, knowing that I gave for the peace the world now enjoys.