

Volume I  
Oral History of Service  
South Pacific  
Theater 1942

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**George J. Baird**

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“Long may the tale be told in the Great Republic”

Winston Churchill speaking of  
The Battle of Guadalcanal



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I suppose you really need to have a general picture of the times before the war in order to get an idea for a starting point. As you know, we had just come out of the depression and I had graduated from high school in 1938, had not been able to go to college, and groped around for jobs. At the time when the war had finally started, I had been working for Fanner's Manufacturing Company down near the zoo off of Pearl Road, and had what, at that time, was a very high paying although a very menial job working in the shipping room at a plant making parts that were used in the production of various kinds of steel equipment which of course included, at that point with the military buildup going on, things for the government. Because things were busy, the reason it was a fairly high paying job was because there was so much overtime and rather than working the normal 40 hour week, we were working upwards of 56 or 57 hours a week and getting time and a half or double for the extra hours and bringing home some pretty good paychecks.

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Fanner's Manufacturing (1952 picture)

“At the time the war had finally started,  
I was working for Fanner's Manufacturing.”

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At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, I had been given a number in the draft arrangement for the Army, which at that time was in effect as the Army military was building up. You were assigned a number and then called in relationship to where your number was in the list of the lottery, and I had a number that was called fairly early so that I was due in December 1941 to report for an Army physical and eventual enlistment in the Army. I did go for the physical, and had some minor problems, but generally as far as I knew I'd been accepted. But I wasn't all that happy and was just biding my time when of course, on December 7th the attack (was made) on Pearl Harbor.

At that time, I was dating your mother and had a date that Sunday on which we were to drive Russ and Tate to Kent (State University) where Russ was going to school. He and Tate had been dating for a long time so it was common for the four of us to make the trip to Kent since Russ didn't have a car and I did. We, of course, all were very upset about our futures and/or lack of futures because of Pearl Harbor when we heard about the attack. None of us really knew where Pearl Harbor or Honolulu was. We knew generally where the Hawaiian Islands were, but that was about it. We had known that there was the danger of war all the time, and this was the reason the military had been building up gradually and calling people into the service under the draft laws. So that Sunday afternoon, we went down to Kent and sat in the Robin Hood Restaurant, which was the local gathering place for the students, and talked about what we could do or shouldn't do and should we go in the service.

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The Robin Hood Inn, Kent Ohio  
"We talked about what we should do."

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Russ questioned whether he should quit college and all of us wondered what the future was going to hold for us. The next day, I took off from my job to go sit in the car and listen to the radio when President Roosevelt made his declaration of war at 1:00. (See Appendix 1)

One thing led to another, and finally I decided to try and enlist in the Marine Corps because I thought the Marine Corps would have much better training than the Army, and theoretically, I would be better off. Some of my friends, Frank Glover for instance, my closest friend, and Meryl Young, a friend of his who had become a friend of mine, sat and talked about it and they both thought I was crazy to consider going into the Marine Corps. I was just going to end up getting killed right off the bat. They were opting for waiting and delaying as long as possible and going into the Air Corps and getting the long training that entailed and the professional training in becoming an officer at the end of it, where I would be going into the private (enlisted) sector. To make a long story a short one, Glover was killed in Europe. He had been shot down once over France and brought back by the French Resistance only to be sent up again on the premise that he shouldn't be allowed to sit and brood over his problems. Then the very first flight back out again he was shot down and killed somewhere over Germany. Meryl Young walked into the propeller of an airplane and was all chewed up and never able to go into any kind of real work after that at all. He was sent out of the military, pretty much a cripple. So, while I ended up with some problems later on, at least I came back and was able to have a normal life after the war.

When I enlisted in the Marine Corps in January, or attempted to enlist, they told me I couldn't see well enough and would have to get glasses. So I marched across the street and found an optician in downtown Cleveland off Public Square and had my eyes tested and ordered glasses which they made up for me in a couple of days. I went back and took the Marine Corps test again. As an oddity, I never did put the glasses on and didn't in fact put them on after that, although I carried them with me and eventually they were broken by a bomb explosion on Guadalcanal. That was my first brush with eye problems.

The 19th of January (1942), when I went into the Marine Corps, we were to leave that evening for Paris Island, South Carolina. So

I was signed in and was told to report to the Terminal Tower, (Train terminal in downtown Cleveland) to be taken on to boot camp at Paris Island. Somewhere between the time that we were given these instructions and we showed up there, there had been a change. After we got on the train, we found that we were heading for the West Coast to San Diego. While my mother and dad had been down at the terminal to see me off, the first inclination that they had that I was heading other than to South Carolina was when I sent them a postcard from somewhere in Arizona (and said) that I would write to them again. I couldn't tell them any more than that because of the fact that we were only allowed to give basic information at that stage and couldn't divulge what bases we were going to.

When we got to San Diego, we met our first DI (drill instructor) when we got off the train and were marched down the street to a bus, which took us to the camp. The recruit depot in San Diego was a big sprawling affair near the Consolidated Aircraft Manufacturing Plant, where a lot of planes were built in that stage of the war. The camp had views which were absolutely terrific in the morning looking up into the mountains when you had to get out for morning colors. But other than that, it was a really rough sort of typical bootcamp like you read in stories. Nothing was easy, and they bullied you and screamed at you until you felt that you were ready to go jump off a cliff if need be. However, the bootcamp was reduced from the supposed 13 weeks, which was the minimum, to six weeks. Then I was assigned to the radio and telephone school for, again theoretically, another 6-13 weeks training period, only to find out after 3 or 4 weeks that there was an opening for a couple of the men in the class to go overseas. While we had no real notion of where it was, we all assumed it was Pearl Harbor. After everybody in the class except two or three of us volunteered to fill those two slots, they decided that they couldn't make a choice any fairer than simply pick the first two guys in the alphabet. I forget the first guy's name, but the second name was Baird. So my trip was started.

Out to Pearl Harbor and the Third Marine Defense Battalion, which I joined there. The Third Defense had quite a peacetime history. From training on the beaches in South Carolina to China, and back to Pearl Harbor. It had been overseas quite a while when the war started. Most of these guys were at that time, I presume, fairly typical Marines. They were guys who had come into the service because they had been in trouble with the law, or because they were poor and out of work and couldn't find any other job, or they enlisted in the Marine Corps to have something to do or whatever. But essentially a bunch of, well, not exactly prime time first class college graduate-type people. As we were to find out later on in combat, the best kind of guys to be with. Maybe because they weren't taught to think and read, and didn't worry about all that- just to do what they were told to do and do it well. (See Appendix 2)

My best friend in bootcamp was a guy named Bernard Young, who later on in the war was to come back into my life but at that point had applied for Officers Candidates School when I went to the telephone and radio school. He finally had gotten into OCS and so was staying behind. I wouldn't see him again until later in the war.

We finally left from San Francisco on our trip as replacements to the Third Defense (Battalion) at Pearl (Harbor) and were basically assigned to a camp in the hills overlooking Pearl Harbor called Camp Catlin. It was a camp, which was in a sugar cane field at the edge of a little salt lake. The main feature of the camp at that point was a prison camp for Japanese prisoners of the Pearl Harbor attack and civilian prisoners who had been put into the camp based on the fact that they were considered enemy aliens.



Marines at Camp Catlin

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Camp Catlin was in the canefields east of Honolulu along the island's main highway. Its site selected by a board of Marine colonels, Catlin eventually would see tens of thousands of Marines pass through its gates into the farthest reaches of the Pacific as it became the principal replacement and redistribution center for the Fleet Marine Force.

(See Appendix Notes on Camp Catlin)

Part of the job of our outfit was to guard them, but my particular job assignment was as a telephone man, of course, but directly in Pearl Harbor. We had to string wire from telephone pole to telephone pole through Pearl Harbor, and we had gun positions on tops of buildings. We had a machine gun position, for instance, in our headquarters on what was called the Aviation Materials Building overlooking battleship row across the channel.

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**Battleship Row during the Pearl Harbor Attack**  
"We expected the Japanese to come back at any time."

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I finally moved into a little tent that I put up on top of the building. I stayed there around the clock rather than going back up to the camp all the time. We ran shifts around the clock on these machine gun positions which were deemed to be a very necessary part of our defenses because we expected the Japanese to come back any time because of the damage they had done at Pearl Harbor and the lack of men. For instance, just that one Marine Defense Battalion there – roughly 700 men- and some small Army detachments and Air Corps and Navy air detachments. There really wasn't any great amount of defense.

All of us who were there felt that the Japanese could take over the island any time they really wanted to. Of course, they never tried. So life there was fairly uneventful. We were allowed to visit Honolulu on our off-duty hours and it was a much more attractive town then than it is now-without all the high rise buildings, just the two main hotels, the Moana and the Royal Hawaiian. But we also had a 6:00 p.m. curfew so we weren't allowed into town in the evenings at all. We were able to go to the USO where Ray Anthony had a dance band that played.

#### **Ray Anthony**

Born January 20, 1922 in Bentleyville, PA, Raymond Antonini began his musical career at the tender age of five playing in the "Antonini Family Orchestra". Ray went on to play trumpet with local bands through high school as well as forming his own band and working with such notables as Al Donahue and Jimmy Dorsey. At age 18, became a member of the original Glenn Miller Orchestra at the height of its popularity. Formed his own band while serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II and voted hottest band in the Pacific Islands.

They had a variety of activities. The Royal Hawaiian and Moana were already set aside for what was later to become called R & R (rest and relaxation) for people who were on ships that were sunk, or damaged and were sent there for a break from the war. Defense Battalion was a real odd sort of thing in the Marine Corps. It was meant as it later was to become, a unit for islands like Wake Island, Christmas Island, and other small islands as kind of a total all-around defense force. It included a few riflemen, a few machine gunners and artillerymen, and a few of this and a few of that and not a heck of a lot of any one thing. It was strictly meant

for small outposts. The outfit was also kind of out of place at Pearl Harbor because the whole island of Oahu was much bigger than anything that a defense battalion was meant to be part of. The original First, Third, and Sixth Defense Battalion(s) all started out as the First Defense and went to Wake Island. The Third Defense stayed at Pearl Harbor and the Sixth Defense went to Midway. But that was all formed out of one group, and then with the new people added, was considerably less when the war started than normal strength so they were comparatively small groups. So we were out of our real element also at Guadalcanal, though it was to become a fairly natural arrangement when we were assigned to basically the airfield defense. Of course, at Guadalcanal the airfield was the end all and be all of the whole thing. Taking away the airfield (from the Japanese) and then protecting it and making that our own base to keep the Japanese off guard was the first really major step back from Pearl Harbor. It was to become a definite fact in the Pacific that Midway had been the turning point in stopping them and Guadalcanal was the start-back and was later to lead to all of the other things that were to happen in the war.

The next thing that popped up as far as the military part of the war for us happened suddenly in the late days of May. We were put on around-the-clock assignments loading ships. We would work eight hours and be allowed to rest for four hours, then work for eight more hours, etc. As it turned out, they had intercepted the Japanese messages about an attack and we were to end up going to Midway and were loading the ships with ammunition and stuff to take to Midway. (See Appendix 3)

The Midway battle, of course, became primarily a naval battle, but like anything else, when you're involved it seems like everything is happening to you. We had some fairly heavy bombing on these little sand strips where there is almost no place to hide.



Midway Atoll  
"Almost no place to hide"

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We lost most of our planes right away. We had a lot of old Brewster Buffalo planes which were very similar to planes I had seen Jimmy Dolittle and others fly at the Cleveland National Air Races. They were offshoots of that plane and with 200 miles an hour slower speed than the Japanese zero; it led to absolute disaster.



**The Brewster Buffalo**  
**“It led to absolute disaster.”**

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The Midway thing was a revelation because of being the first under-fire experience, but we went back to Pearl Harbor fairly quickly after the Japanese attack, which was on June 4th. I believe on the 10th we left to go back to Pearl (Harbor). The next month or so we were still involved in a lot of hectic loading of ships and so forth, and as we were to find, were earmarked for another trip. This time we went aboard ship for what was eventually the attack of Guadalcanal. Nobody on the ship knew where Guadalcanal was, or what it was other than we were told it was a big island. Just what it had to do with the war, why we were going there, or what we were going to do, none of us knew. In the later days of the trip, we were told that the Japanese had an airfield there, or may have an airfield, or maybe had started an airfield. Nobody really knew, and that was the problem. If there was an airfield, it was a problem for New Zealand, Australia, New Caledonia and all the other places around that were either ours or friendly to us. So we were in a convoy that involved, at the point we left Pearl Harbor, I believe four ships. We were later to leave Suva Figi, where we were finally to see what seemed like a mass of ships. There was the total group of the battle fleet and landing fleet for the attack. So that was the base point for the troops who had come up from New Zealand. The First Division had trained in New Zealand and the Third Defense Battalion and a group of other people had been picked up along different points. At that point in the war, the lack of available troops was a major part of our problem because there just were no troops out there to be pushed into combat quickly except these small insulated groups and then part of the First Marine Division. So we were all packed together and became the basic landing force for the Guadalcanal operation.

The Marine Corps at the time was a very, very small group. My serial number for instance was 352410, which is not nearly as many numbers as would be in anybody's numbering system today. The Marine Corps was very poorly equipped as compared to the Army. What we had in the way of weapons were WWI rifles and our 90mm coast artillery guns dated back to WWI. We had no true anti-aircraft weapon, although we were to use the 90m-coast artillery as an anti-aircraft gun at Guadalcanal as well as trying to use our hand-held machine gun. That was almost an impossibility particularly since the Japanese did not do a great deal of low (altitude) attack sort of things, and there was no way to reach them at their 23-26 thousand feet (of altitude). The little bit of so-called field artillery we had also were WWI, I believe 37mm, and very ineffective sort of weapons. But at that time, that was the Marine Corps and the reason we were on Guadalcanal was the same reason that the other troops were there. We were the only troops available to go.

The United States was not prepared, so that the landing on Guadalcanal was made theoretically by the First Marine Division, but actually we were not part of the Division except as attached for that particular operation. The Second Marine Regiment was part of the Second Marine Division, not the First. They just grabbed everybody that was at all possible and this was kind of a desperation move. I don't think our military brass knew what the heck to do and the Japanese were building an airfield there. Once it was built, they could reach New Zealand and particularly Australia and islands of theirs. So they decided they had to stop them and they just reached out and collared everybody that was available. (See Appendix 4)

Of course, it's very hard to describe your feelings when you are young and going off to war and don't have the slightest idea of where you're going, what you are going to see, what's going to happen as far as the military part of it. Whether you are going to end up in a big major landing against all kinds of ammunition and guns. (You wonder) how you're going to be able to get enough nerve to get off the ship, get into that little landing boat and go ashore, (or) whether you're going to be too frightened to do it.

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**Troops Loading Landing Craft in the Solomons-August 1942**  
**“Get into that little landing boat...**  
**or whether you’re going to be too frightened to do it.”**

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**On the ship, everyone kids each other and talks and laughs. We had the crossing of the equator ceremony where essentially any Navy guy would beat the living daylights out of you as an excuse for introducing you into the land of Neptune and the fact that you are no longer a “land lubber”- you’ve crossed the equator.**

**The only real work we had to do on the ship was that in order to have some extra defense on this Liberty Ship transport we were on, we began to rig up our machine guns around the perimeter and that meant getting up and stringing up telephone wires from point to point on the ship. That meant climbing the rigging part way in order to put up the telephone wires. That wasn’t the most pleasant sort of thing with my problem with heights, particularly since during part of it I was seasick. Getting up there and rocking on those became very precarious.**

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**Arcturus Class Liberty Ship**

**Like the USS Betelgeuse, which took the Third Defense Battalion to Guadalcanal  
“Getting up there and rocking on those became very precarious.”**

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When we finally got to the area where we were told we were going to be going ashore the next morning, the doubt, of course, intensified. But the unrealness of the whole thing was cruising along, and (that) we didn't see any enemy. We were in sight of this chain of islands, and we were to move up overnight so we would be in position. We were trying to sleep and not able to, and cleaning our guns while trying to calm our nerves enough to stay sane overnight.

When daybreak came, the cruisers and destroyers starting firing at the shore and carried on a barrage from just before daybreak. I suppose the first boats started to shore about 6:00 a.m. We ended up somewhere after 8:00, climbing down that landing net with our pack and rifle and getting into that little boat. There was a variety of firing going on and we were off to shore.

The Japanese planes by that time had discovered we were there and were coming in and making their attacks on the boats. I was just generally trying to figure out how I was ever going to get between that boat and the shore in one piece. Not being able to swim, I was trying to figure out what would happen when they sank the boat, which I was sure they were going to do. But we got ashore and had no real opposition at the beach at all. This was to be the case on Guadalcanal although half of the Third Defense had gone to Tulagi across the bay, and had a great deal of opposition and lost quite a few men. So we were lucky.

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**Marines Coming Ashore on Guadalcanal August 7,1942  
“We expected them to bomb us any minute.”**

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The first thing we had to do was spread out on the beach and the inevitable- string the telephone wire and then get the telephones connected so that the various people of our outfit on the beach could communicate with each other and also to the beach master, (the controlling officer for the landing), so we knew what to do from one minute to the next. We got that all set up and were pretty much in position, looking out at the water and trying to figure out what was happening next most of the time. We were watching the Japanese planes as they'd come in. We expected them to bomb us any minute, but they didn't. I saw one dead Japanese on one of the beach areas and one wounded one who was taken prisoner, but no more than that on the first day.

As I have told you before, I'm sure, on that first day while we were busy doing that stringing of wire on the beach, I was to have that experience of climbing the coconut tree which took all the nerve I had in me. I had to climb up high enough to get my telephone wire up so nothing would disturb it and run it from one tree to the next. I got up in the tree, and the doggoned tree broke off at the base and pitched me out into the ocean with my climbing spikes on and of course, not being able to swim, scared the living daylights out of me. But the water was so shallow that I was able to get myself disentangled from the tree and walk to shore. The first night was simply a night when nobody slept. Everybody worried about what was going to happen to them and we moved just a very short distance inland; hunkered down in the sand and dug a hole, which we were told to do and prepared to see what would happen next.

I would eventually lose track of the days- at that point in time it was all blurred together and it was not a really major military thing. It was a time of moving into position for those first few days until we were to become the defense group on what was later to become Henderson Field. Lever Brothers, the British company who made all sorts of soaps owned the whole plantation of palm trees that we were in. I suppose the recap of the time on Guadalcanal would include telling you what happened from the first day on and my memory is not that great that I can remember it all. But I do know that after the first night we lost all of the cruisers and our transports ran away. That first night, incidentally, I spent under a Japanese truck without ever thinking about the fact that the gas tank was filled with gas. They were shooting and I was under the gas tanks, which was not really the most intelligent thing to do.

The second night, we had moved up to the fringe of what was to be Henderson Field. The runway was not complete. The Japanese had started at both ends and they had a big section in the middle that wasn't done. We stayed in a coconut grove right at the very edge of the eastern end of the runway.

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**Henderson Field August 1942**

**“It was to become the heart and soul and aiming point.”**

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Somewhere right after dark, all hell broke loose and everybody was shooting and we figured they were making a counter attack to drive us to the beaches. The oddity was that we only had one man wounded. He was shot in the rear end, right through the buttocks and when the doctors got to him, they found that the bullet was a 30 caliber American bullet. So he was the only one wounded and we had to realize the next day that all the shooting was from one of our groups into one of our other groups. It's lucky we didn't kill each other. There were no Japanese there that night at all.

When we finally got our positions on the airfield, there was ridge on the side closer to the beach from the airfield that had been dug to protect planes from bombing attacks and stuff. One building which was called the Pagoda was at one end of this ridge.

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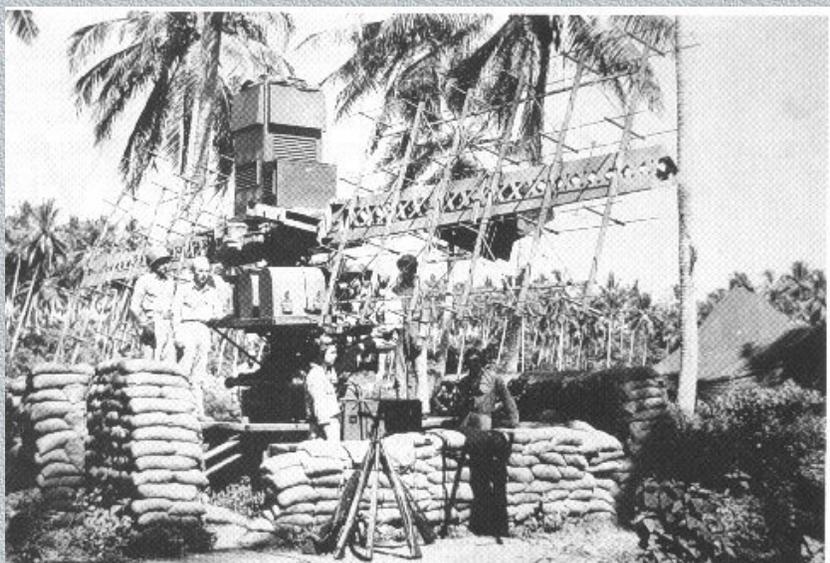


**The Pagoda at Henderson Field**  
"This was to keep us in hot water pretty much all the time."

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So we dug into the side of the ridge closest to the airfield and built our little lean-to with coconut logs in which we were to put our telephone switchboards. I was to man this part-time along with the other two telephone men. The radar, which we had brought from Pearl Harbor and which was the original radar that had detected the Japanese planes there, we had taken from the Army. There was no other radar available at the time we left, and we set that up and that was at the opposite end of the ridge from the Pagoda.

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**The SCR268 Search Radar on Guadalcanal**  
"We set that up..at the opposite end of the ridge."

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The communications center was in this little dugout in the hill where I manned the switchboard for eight hours and then two other men took their turn so it was manned around the clock. Then when there was an emergency for some reason, I ended up being the one to be there. The early days were absolutely terrible because we had no defense against the Japanese planes coming in because the airfield wasn't finished. There was a radio tower in the middle of this little ridge, about 300 feet long. So it was very concentrated with the radar tower, the radio tower, and the Pagoda. It was to become the heart and soul of the Japanese aiming points for their bombing runs and was to keep us in hot water pretty much all the time. The routine at first was work, work, work, and we had no food except for the 3 days rations that we had started out with. We had to try to figure out what we were going to do for food, since the Navy ships when they left had taken most of the food with them. They had thrown some overboard which floated to shore and some that didn't. But in any case, we were left without any supplies.

No extra ammunition, no extra food, no extra medicine, because the Navy lost a group of four cruisers and they were really battered by the Japanese on the second night and all of our supply ships had left rather than be sunk. So we were left alone and lonely.

#### Naval Battle of Savo Island

On August 7, 1942, United States Marines landed on the island of Guadal canal under the cover of a powerful American Fleet, including three carriers and a battleship. When he received word of the landings, Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa immediately sortied from Rabaul with a force of five heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and one aging destroyer. On the evening of August 8, this fleet encountered an Allied force of five heavy cruisers and four destroyers. Yet it was Mikawa inflicted, as one historian put it, "The Worst Blue Water Defeat in the History of the United States Navy". When it was over, four heavy cruisers were sunk, another severely damaged, and her captain forever labeled a coward.

The Japanese planes attacked generally around 1:00 every day and I've read that this was because of the long way they had to fly. They were at the very limit of their ability too, so they had to leave early in order to get done there and return to base without any problems before dark. The general pattern was to come in from the ocean flying pretty high, and then bomb using our nice little radar and radio towers as aiming points and target points. So we took quite a beating every day. We had set up a little tent just below

the dugout where we slept the night unless there was an alarm. Then we ran up to the dugout or to foxholes, either one. Shrapnel had come so close that it had destroyed my glasses and a picture I had of your mother, but so far hadn't really done any major damage as far as wounds to manpower and stuff.

The lack of modern or up-to-date weapons as I suppose would have made a lot of difference and yet we didn't know the difference because we didn't really know that the Army had better things than we had. We suspected so, because most everything in the way of food and stuff we got were the rejects of what the Army brass didn't want.

The fact that we had no airplanes was a devastating sort of thing because the Japanese planes could just fly in very calmly and drop their bombs and turn around and go right back. There was no effective anti-aircraft as I've mentioned. The fact that there were no fighter planes to attack the Japanese planes meant that we were pretty much at their mercy. If they had flown in a little bit lower, they could've been more accurate but they kept beating up the airfield, which we were trying to complete. The airfield had not been finished in the center part, but the Seabees were working around the clock filling in the (center) and making it usable. The constant air raids and the fact that we had little food and didn't know what was going on made it pretty miserable from day to day.

I can still remember the day when we were told that we were finally getting some fighter planes and I was standing outside the dugout watching the sky when these fifteen or so planes came in one after another and we had our first fighter planes. I was eventually to learn the name of every single one of those pilots and know which one was in which plane when they took off. (See Appendix 5)



VMF 223....One of the first Marine Air Groups  
"They were absolutely terrific"

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The dogfights took place a great many times right over the airfield, so that you really had a front row seat to watch and see planes hit and shot down and other planes blow up in the sky. It was quite a big thing and hard to explain really. It is hard to tell you just how much it meant because if you rooted at a football game or a Cleveland Browns game, you are talking about 1% of the feeling and energy that went into rooting for those planes. They did a terrific job. I suppose that while you hear about the British pilots who did so much for Great Britain, I don't think any group of pilots ever did more for their country than the first Marine pilot group that we had. They were absolutely terrific.

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Some of the few who served so well.  
“I don't think of any group of pilots ever did more for their country.”

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I told you before about the lack of food and I am sure you have heard me tell the group before that we were relegated after our week of rations ran out to what we could pick up from the Japanese stuff that was left behind. Finally, we ended up with a ration in the morning of a tablespoon full of rice and a tablespoon of barley. Unfortunately, both of them had been pretty well sitting in the sun for a long time so sometimes the pieces of rice were crawling across the plate. They were loaded with maggots, but that was all we had to eat. I think you probably know that when I finally got home from Guadalcanal, I weighed something under 120 lbs. so that obviously it was a diet that helped you lose weight.

One of the most touching things that happened to me on Guadalcanal was one day when I was running the switchboard in the morning and everybody else had gone to the little chow line that was set up to get the rice and barley. I was watching our SBD's, our dive-bombers, coming back in from a trip they had made out to bomb some Japanese shipping that their Navy was sending down our way. I was watching the planes coming down and one of the SBD's came wobbling in about 100 ft. off the ground and right behind it was a plane that I immediately knew was not ours. I started screaming into the telephone that this was a Japanese plane. I should have put the damn telephone down and grabbed my rifle. It was so close that I could have hit it. But instead of that, they shot the tailgunner, then just moved right up and shot the pilot and the plane crashed at the end of the runway. I always thought that if I'd done something different, grabbed the gun, I might have been able to stop it. That is probably not the case because by the time I 'd have got the rifle out, the whole thing would have been over.

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**A Dauntless SBD on Henderson Field 1942**  
**“The plane crashed at the end of the runway.”**

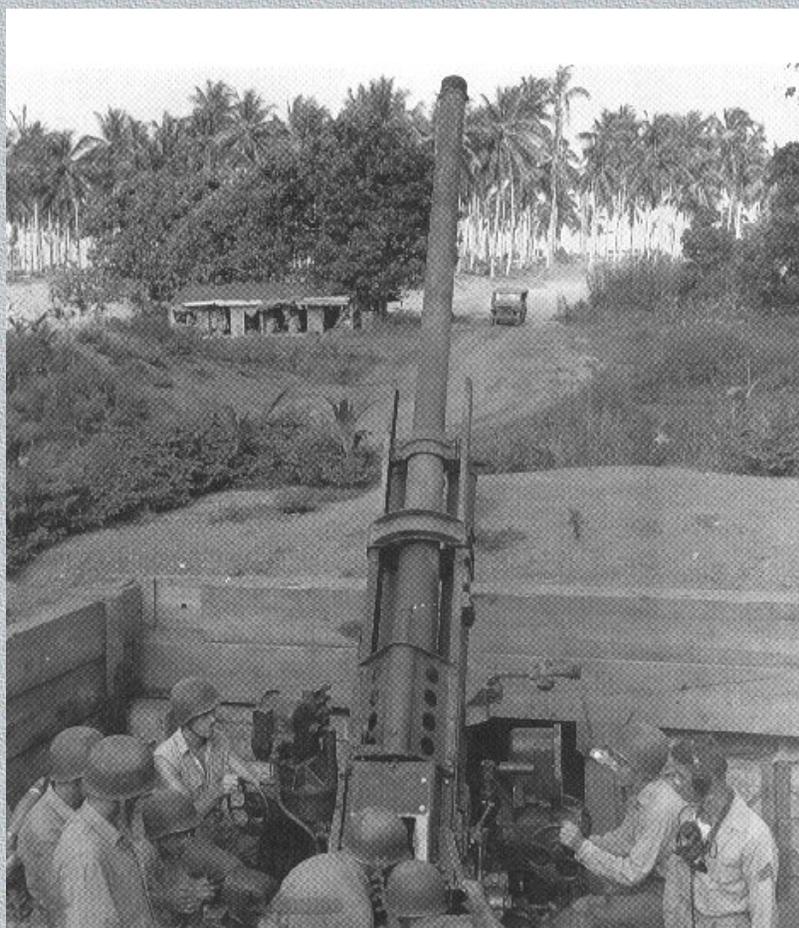
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We had some reasonably good days as I think I have mentioned earlier. When the weather was bad (which inhibited enemy action) we would go down to the stream very close to us and that was our only chance to get clean and take off all our clothes and climb in the water. We would wash our clothes, take them back and hang them on a tree and let them dry partly before we put them back on.

As the days went by, we got more and more the feeling that we would never get out of there. That we were a sacrifice to try to slow the Japanese down and that's all that would happen because they kept getting stronger and stronger. They kept landing more troops (but) until the 13th of October; we stayed just the way we were as far as numbers of men. We couldn't land anyone else. We didn't get more equipment. We didn't get any more food. We didn't get anything. Then this one Army regiment came in on the 13th and, of course, that's the day I ended up really out of any part of it. But the Japanese kept getting stronger and stronger and the only thing that kept us going was the fact that we kept getting a few more airplanes. They became the major part of the defense and we also did get more artillery pieces in for our troops. (See Appendix 6)

Another Marine regiment came in that was an artillery regiment and they would set up right in the middle of the airfield shooting the artillery pieces back into the hills. The Japanese were close enough that this short-range artillery had to be sitting right smack outside of our little dugout in order to do their shelling and protect the airfield.

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**90 mmGun of the Third Defense Battalion Dug in on Guadalcanal**  
**“We had no real anti-aircraft weapon.”**

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But we kept getting bombed everyday and the bombings got worse after I got hurt and was in the hospital. As I understand it, so did the shelling from the guns in the hills and stuff so those things were not all that well settled when I finally got off the island.

One of the things that is kind of interesting to know and hard to believe and hard to realize, I guess, (was that) we had a lot of guys who were shooting themselves in the foot. We had a corpsman; in fact he was the head of the corpsman, who was kind of openly homosexual. At that time, that was a real rarity because they weren't permitted in the service, but he didn't make any bones about it partly to get off Guadalcanal and get home, but he also broke his arm. Put it across a log or something and hit it with his rifle butt or whatever and broke his arm in order to hopefully get sent out with one of us going out on the boats to the outside hospitals. But that didn't work because they told him that he wouldn't get off the island at any time in the future if the officers could help it. They would keep him until hell froze over. He was later on to become a major part of my life. At a later stage, we were in New Zealand and the battalion got a chance to send home about eight wounded men, and he was in charge of selecting which guys went home. For whatever reason, a couple of men who had been overseas in China and for many months at Pearl Harbor before I joined the outfit, were deemed to be less hurt and I was selected to come back to the States. So for whatever reason he picked me and I was glad to be one of them, and eventually that led to coming back home.

I guess to summarize the Guadalcanal feeling was that we felt that we were just a forlorn bunch of people who weren't going to get any help. We weren't going to get out of there and just make the best of a really terrible situation. I suppose, without those few great pilots and those fighter planes everybody would have given up completely.

I was in a better position than most of the guys because in my record book for admittance to the Marine Corps, the fact that I had worked with the Cleveland Plain Dealer as a reporter, covering suburban news like Parma and Parma Heights and so forth, made me kind of a semi-celebrity. Since I also had the command post telephone and had the one and only radio in the dugout with me, one of my jobs was to take the radio broadcasts that I got from the Armed Services Radio and interpret it or read and comment on it. Every time we got a news broadcast, I would tell the guys at the various gun positions who had their telephones, and they in turn would tell their eight or ten buddies who were on that particular position what the news of the day or the week was. No one else had any way of getting news from the outside world. So I was the communicator. I was the guy who passed the word around to the whole battalion.

One other episode that I might mention about Guadalcanal. It was a strange thing and something that sure as heck sticks in my mind. I was on the switchboard one night, and I suppose it was pretty close to midnight. I was supposed to go off duty at midnight and one of the gun positions didn't answer...the one way out on the perimeter. So I finally got Captain Gill, who was our executive officer and told him about it. I told him that I didn't know what the answer was. Whether we had been attacked by the Japanese or whatever, I just couldn't raise them. I kept ringing and ringing. We had a hand-cranked thing on the phone that caused the other phone to ring pretty loudly. So naturally, what happened next was that (Captain) Gill said he would take over the switchboard temporarily and for me to go and find out what happened. So I had to go across that whole field adjacent to the runway and the airport. I had to try to remember the password and stay low enough so that nobody would shoot at me because they saw me. I got all the way across to that gun position and crawled over the edge and there the guy is; sound asleep. I got down in the hole and gave him a great big kick in the rear end and yelled at him to get up! Then I had to crawl all the way back to headquarters, still hoping that nobody would shoot at me, just because he fell asleep.

On October 13th, the planes came in from the other way over the mountains. I wasn't fortunate enough that day to be working at my regular job manning the switchboard. I was in a foxhole only to have two bombs straddle the foxhole and create enough force to drive me underground and to really bash up the guy who was with me and break most of the bones in his body. But I was lucky enough to somehow be in that fringe; in-between the two bombs. The guys had to dig me out because while I had gotten into this deep foxhole, the force of the bombs had driven all the dirt and stuff down on top of us from the side of the hill. I don't think anyone expected either one of us to be alive. I guess I was an ugly sight when I got out. When I got up and walked around I guess I was bleeding from the ears and nose. Most of the pain was in my chest, but the blood must have made me look pretty bad. I was to go sometime later that day to the field hospital at the edge of the airfield and was given a bunk. They offered me some sleeping pills and pain pills. I just wouldn't take them. I had a feeling that I didn't want to be out of it. I wanted to be able to run or hide or whatever might be called for and not be peacefully asleep.



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Guadalcanal Field Hospital  
"I was lucky I was not there."

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Sometime later that evening, I got very uncertain about everything in general and finally crawled out of the hospital and went into a dugout that they had for an air raid shelter. Not very long after that the horrendous shelling started with the Japanese Navy having moved a couple of battleships and other ships right off the coast. They just pounded the daylight out of primarily the airfield, but of course all the shorter rounds were landing all around us. A number of them hit in the hospital area. We really didn't think we were going to last through the night. The coconut logs over the dugout were bouncing up and down and dirt was falling on us. But eventually it ended and when I did go back to my bunk area in the hospital, there was a big slab of shrapnel that had gone through the bunk and down into the dirt below the bunk. I was lucky I was not there. The next several days were almost as bad, although the shelling from the sea didn't happen in the daytime, but we were bombed. They also had moved a couple of artillery pieces, what we called "Pistol Pete", up close enough to fire at the airfield. They were going to try to take some of us out to a rear hospital and tried to take us out on a plane. One of those artillery pieces blew off part of the tail, so the plane wasn't able to fly and we had to go back to the hospital.

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Plane Damaged on Henderson Field in "The Great October Shelling"  
"The plane wasn't able to fly and we went back to the hospital"

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Then on the third or fourth day, they took us out to what was the McFarland. The McFarland was a WWI destroyer that was being used as a combination destroyer, cargo towboat, and all kinds of things to bring in some ammunition and barges of gasoline for the planes. It was the only real supply method we had. There were no tankers or anything. They had these big 50 gallon drums all lashed together on a barge and then they actually had to empty those things pretty much by hand and take them to the airfield where the planes were fueled out of those tanks.

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USS MCFARLAND (AVD 14, ex DD 237)

"They dropped a bomb which blew up the back 1/3 of the destroyer."

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We had just gotten on the McFarland. It had come in the morning and was trying to unload and then to get out again before the normal 1:00 air raids and any other air raids later in the day which we had. So we went aboard ship and they did have food. They were serving ham sandwiches and I got as far as getting in line and getting a ham sandwich in my hand when three Japanese divebombers came diving down and they dropped a bomb which blew up pretty much the back 1/3 of the destroyer. We had had a submarine alert just before that so that the Navy guys had armed the depth charges for the sub and unfortunately, those went up with the bomb and made a really horrendous sight. The gas barge was burning and flames were as high as two or three houses. It looked like an inferno that was going to engulf all of us. The ship wasn't able to move. Almost all of the steering and propellers were in the back 1/3 (of the ship), so we were pretty much sitting ducks for anything else that came along.

The ship started to sink, so they had given orders to prepare to abandon ship. They had passed out what few life preservers they had. I guess there were about 200 Marines who were on there because of wounds or other problems along with a crew. They had maybe 20 extra life preservers so I ended up without one. Not being able to swim, I had to just sit there and wait to see what would happen next. Eventually, a variety of boats came out primarily from Tulagi and started picking up the men. I ended up in a PT boat with somebody named Lt. Montgomery and his crew and was taken to Tulagi. (See Appendix 7) I was helped out of the boat by, believe it or not, the commander of the troops there. We were then taken to a kind of a makeshift field hospital to wait and see what would happen next.

As it happened, and I think you have probably seen pictures, the McFarland did not sink and was towed over to Tulagi. In a matter of time, they had built a rear end for the ship out of coconut logs. They made kind of a raft for the back end of the ship. It was eventually to go all the way back to the United States that way and be rebuilt. The crew, particularly the officers, were given medals for saving the ship. (See Appendix 8)

I keep harping on the fact that the lack of food was a major part of all that Guadalcanal experience. I suppose I will mention one other episode. While I was in the hospital, the day before we were eventually to get on the McFarland, they announced that they had some food. They were going to serve it so we all got in a line, waiting for this handout of food that was coming up.

Unfortunately, one of the Japanese cruiser planes came in and saw this line of men and came down and started to strafe, and actually shot the guy in front of me. So we got no food. We were without food until we got on the McFarland, and that ham sandwich was like gold, which I was going to get there. Then the doggoned Japanese came back again!

We finally did get on another destroyer and started (out) for what turned out to be the hospital at Efate. The trip there was not all that uneventful because we had several submarine scares. In one case, we actually had a sub on the surface and to this day I don't know whether it was theirs or ours. There wasn't any shooting between them so I presume it must have been one of ours.

However, we were told to find a barge that was floating around that had been cut loose from the ship that evidently was under attack. The barge was let go so the ship could maneuver better. We eventually found it and they put towlines on it and we towed it, which of course made the trip slower. While we were supposedly in American held territory, it wasn't all that clear in those days.

The Japanese Navy had such major control of the area that they had submarines scattered all through the area. It wasn't even impossible that we might not have had a destroyer there at that end of the island at that time.

The hospital stay was to be for quite a while. The major injuries and treatment for me involved my ears, in which both eardrums had been ruptured. At that time in the Pacific, they had some of the new sulfa powders. Penicillin itself was fairly new at the time. They used a combination treatment of blowing that powder in and using a little knife at the end of a long rod to keep scraping the scab off. They saved my hearing. The chest problem was one where nothing much could be done. The muscles had been torn, but they decided to just let them heal back as best as they could and of course they did. I had pain for years afterward, but it eventually went away.

So then...back to the hospital in New Hebrides. The living was really great compared to what it had been before. We got three meals a day and while I was hurt, I was able to walk around and the island was pretty. We weren't allowed off the hospital grounds, but you could see the little town with its red roofs.

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Efate, New Hebrides  
"All in all, a pretty place to be."

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We did have a lot of very badly wounded people, of course. So since I could walk around, one of the things I was able to do was to help the corpsman with the variety of odds and ends. A couple of times while I was there, the influx of wounded people became very heavy and this was when ships were sunk. Particularly, I believe, it was (USS) Atlanta, when so many men were so badly burned. All this black, peeling skin with guys coming in with almost no hope of living. The burn techniques at that time were certainly nothing like what they are today. How many of those guys are still around, all scarred, or how many didn't live, I really don't know.

#### USS Atlanta

USS Atlanta (CL-51); Flagship Rear Admiral Norman Scott (KIA), Captain Samuel B. Jenkins, CO, Commander Campbell D. Emory, XO - Severely damaged, torpedoed by IJN DD Akatsuki after firing the initial rounds of the battle at her which played a significant part in her destruction, 172 killed, 79 wounded, towed to Lunga Point and scuttled 1800; Presidential Unit Citation.

I did have the one experience there that I have talked about before when right after one of the ships were sunk, there were also a lot of Marines who came in who had been ambushed on Guadalcanal. One of the guys, a squad leader, had been hit by both a 50 caliber and 25 caliber machine guns. He had some fifty holes in him from his toes right up to his head, including one ear, which had been cut off. He had bullet holes in his throat, arms, shoulders, stomach, and legs. They asked us to take turns, those of us who were up and around, watching him until he died, giving him water or whatever he wanted. One of the real miracles of the war was that I was eventually to see that guy hopping around and crippled, use of one arm and one leg, but was going back to New Jersey and presumably might still be alive. Impossible, but yet something we saw so often. You see all the television programs where someone goes "pow" and shoots at another guy and he falls down dead. A lot of guys got shot and shot and shot and shot, and just simply didn't fall down dead. So whatever it is.....some people had more to keep them going than others.

I was eventually to move to Efate to New Caledonia, which was another place I had never heard of before. They took us on what was called an R4D, or DC3 airplane, which had no seats or anything. We got in the plane and sat on the metal deck. There were five or six of us along with bags of a variety of things that were going down to New Caledonia. Along with the luggage or whatever you want to call it, we figured out a place to sit in between boxes and bags. The plane was evidently somewhat overloaded because when we took off from the airfield at Efate, suddenly the pilot was screaming "Run forward! Run forward! Run forward!". So we all got up and went to the front of the plane. He couldn't get the tail off of the ground, and as it happened, we eventually ended up at the end of the runway below the treetops and went between the coconut trees, which they had cut off. I suppose we cleared the trees by maybe 10 ft. or so. That was my first airplane ride. Then I suppose about 500 ft. over the water. They weren't about to go very high because the Japanese were not all that far away and they were afraid that someone would pick them up on radar, although no one knew whether the Japanese had radar or not.

When we got to the edge of New Caledonia, which is a mountainous country like most of those islands, we went bounding over the

top of the mountains till we got to this airfield at Noumea. We were put into what was called a "Rehabilitation Camp". In short order, we found out that what you mostly did in a "Rehabilitation Camp" was to go someplace and load ships. So we got back into that routine again although we would just be taken in the morning and work kind of a normal day, and come back to the camp at 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. We weren't really allowed to go into the town, although on our way to the ships we drove through Noumea. It was a free French town and very pretty.

The harbor was a tremendous place. The one thing I remember most about that stay in Noumea was the fact that we were there over New Year's Eve. I can remember mostly that I ended up under my bunk at midnight because everybody else was outside shooting things off. It didn't take anything but the very first rifle shot and I had automatically gotten under the bunk. So, I can remember that New Year's Eve pretty well.

From New Caledonia I was to go on to New Zealand. That trip took place in February, I believe, and we ended up at a state fairgrounds, or local fairgrounds. It was a pretty big place with horse barns and everything and we stayed in the horse barns. The interesting part of that was that there were fourteen of us, all who had been wounded or hurt in the service and were back there to wait until the Third Defense Battalion came back from Guadalcanal. They had stayed that whole time up there; what was left of them. After the first or second day there, we started to get food for the battalion. I mean, beer....enough for 760 men. Ice cream....enough for 760 men. A variety of other things, but those two stand out because I was to be pressed into service helping one of the guys doing the cooking and instead of water, we used beer. We didn't have easy access to water, so what the heck. We used beer every place it called for liquid. We were eventually to take the big ice cream cans, which held I don't know how many gallons of ice cream, into town and give them away. Since I was not married at that time, that was a nice way to go and meet ladies in town who were very happy to get enough ice cream for their family for maybe a year in one of those cans.

The people in New Zealand were absolutely terrific. There were hardly any young men left because their men had gone to Tripoli, Africa, Crete, or Greece. There was nobody but old men and the women and kids. The people felt at that stage that we had more or less saved them from the Japanese so that we were pretty much the fair-haired boys and almost anything that we would want was there to have. We had no transportation, although we were able to bum some bikes finally, and use those to drive into town. It was not at all unusual to strap this can of ice cream on the back of the bicycle, and have it bouncing off the rear wheel of the bike while you went tooling into town with the ice cream starting to melt before you got there because you had no way to pack it. This was really just a place to wait.



New Zealand  
"A very pretty country."

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Eventually the rest of the outfit did come. When it arrived in New Zealand, instead of the 760 or so who had started out at Guadalcanal, there were a little bit over 300 of them. Most of the other guys really had not been hurt or anything, but there was a great deal of malaria. I had malaria while I was on Guadalcanal, but not badly. Most of the other guys had fallen sick or had nervous breakdowns or whatever. There weren't too many of them killed or really severely hurt, but that is all that were able bodied after those months. You have to keep in mind that we were already sick and rundown with malaria and all the rest of it when I left in October. They stayed through February, so I can't imagine how miserable life must have been for that long a period of time.

One of the things I missed mentioning was that while we were on Guadalcanal we had a fairly major earthquake. It was bad enough to upset my bunk and dump me out on the floor. Our course, we had no idea where the thing had been centralized. Since we had no real structures of any kind, it didn't do any real damage there. When I got to New Zealand though, I was to find that New Zealand had been very badly hit. The major part of Wellington, where we first went, had buildings all crumpled in the street

and they had a great deal of damage. It was never publicized then, and to the best of my knowledge, I've never seen anything in a book or magazine about it since.

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**Earthquake Damage in New Zealand 1943**  
**"I was to find out that New Zealand was very badly hit."**

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Earthquake Damage in New Zealand 1943

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I can remember the Red Cross hotel, and that there was a movie just down the street. We went to the movie one day and I was sitting up in the balcony when there was another earthquake. It was a mild one, but I swear that balcony went all the way up to the stage and back. I couldn't have been more scared. Nothing broke. Nothing happened. It just seemed as though the whole building had moved and then come back. We were to find the next day when we were going north in New Zealand that the little bridge across the stream on the road had moved about 6 feet from alignment with the road. You drive down the road and come to an open space where you had to zig across the grass 6 or 7 feet to get on the bridge.

New Zealand is a very pretty country. Because we had very little to do (just sitting around waiting for the rest of our guys to join us), I was able to take some train rides from Masterton, where we had ended up, back down to Wellington to do some sightseeing. The harbor at Wellington is surrounded by very high hills and you can ride up into those hills and look out over the harbor and it's a very pretty kind of circular view and great to look at. The mountains between there and Masterton I suppose are probably just really high hills but very scenic. This little train goes chugging up the way and when it gets to the top, or at least on the trip I was on once, they stop and pull over on a siding and you have tea or a light lunch. Then you get back on the train and go down the other side of the mountain. Of course, there are a lot of sheep and very pretty grass with little lakes. It is an extremely nice country.

North of Masterton, toward the extreme northern end of the island, are some hot springs of a kind of molten lava coming out of the earth. Hot steam coming out, really smelly stuff. I suppose (it) is a great deal like Yellowstone although I have never been there. This place was and still is a big tourist attraction, and we did get up that far to see what that part of New Zealand was like. Basically, good food and stuff. We used to be able to go to a restaurant for instance, and have steak and eggs for breakfast for a shilling, which at that time was worth about 22 cents in American money. So food certainly was no problem, particularly since everybody was battling all these older people and each other to see how many Marines they could invite into their homes and feed. While I didn't drink at the time, we did make a trip to what was called the "Slight Grog" dealer or a bootlegger. Since the town of Masterton was a dry town, this bootlegger set himself up right outside the fence to the fairgrounds and so all we had to do was climb over the fence to get there. I had my one and only drink of scotch that I have ever had in my life there. The two guys I went with bought this bottle of scotch and I had a drink of course since that was the thing to do. I suppose that bottle of scotch was maybe 80 or 85 degrees. Now I suppose that scotch if it is cold maybe doesn't have a very bad taste, but it was like drinking cod liver oil to drink that hot stuff. So that kind of deterred me from doing any great amount of drinking during that period of my life.

Eventually the outfit was allowed to send some men back to the States. I was one of those fortunate few to get a chance to come back home.

The trip back home from New Zealand turned out to be very uneventful, although a very long, long trip. We did have one stop at Pearl Harbor and Honolulu again in which they took on some supplies and extra troops that were going back to the United States

from Pearl Harbor, mostly Navy people.

We came back to the United States under the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco, where incidentally we had departed on our original trip out. We went from there back to San Diego and Camp Elliot, a regular Marine base for processing. We were to stay in quarantine for 3 days and not be allowed to go on liberty or anything. As soon as I arrived there, I had somehow gotten in touch with my friend Bernard Young and he and I went into town together. He was by then a Lieutenant. He got me a pass and we got off the base and went into San Diego and had a very pleasant number of days doing that before we were done with all of our health tests and allowed to go home on a 30 day furlough. I had not at that point had any time off in the Marine Corps because I had been moving all the time.

I was so anxious to get home, but the trains took four days to get to Ohio.  
So....I came back to Ohio for a 30-day furlough.

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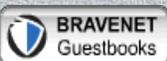
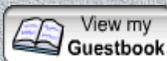
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