

War Story of South Pacific

(By Staff Sergeant Ward Walker, Marine Corps Combat Correspondent.)

Guam, Marianas Islands, Oct. 9.—(Delayed)—It was 10 a. m. The beachhead was still a fresh wound on this island and, below us, men and supplies still streamed ashore.

Here, on the side of a hill, was this tightly knit little group of Marines, one squad of many. Excited by the taste of combat on the beach, the men were eager to probe into the red clay hills rising ahead. They were going to give the Japs hell, they laughed.

Platoon Sergeant Willie Graves, 26, of 430 North Street, Jackson, Miss., who was to die on the slopes the next morning, suggested we accompany this squad.

"They're good boys," he said. "Had the rough edges knocked off at Bougainville. Reckon you can see a bit of action with them. They'll be the lead squad."

Then came the order. "Move out!"

A 22-year-old Marine Corps combat photographer joined us and we moved up the ridge with the others, each of us five yards apart. We advanced cautiously.

Our orders were to move fast, ignoring snipers, until we met the enemy's strength. The snipers soon caught sight of our squad, but our leaders took us safely into the gullies and we hurried across the ridges.

The sun was incredibly hot, glancing off the hard-packed clay with almost a physical impact. To our right and left we could see Marines advancing, long thin lines of men moving warily, weapons ready for an enemy we could not see.

"Wonder where the Japs are?" asked Corporal Robert Wells, 23, of Louisville, N. C., the stocky, square-jawed squad leader.

"They've got to try to stop us pretty soon."

Straight ahead was the sheer bluff that led to the top of a hill known on our map as Howe's Ridge. One man said he guessed we'd meet the Japs near the top of that ridge.

Sniper bullets had been coming close, but it was nearly 4 p. m. before they drew blood from our squad. We were about 50 yards from the top of Howe's Ridge.

Private First Class Victor G. Chaplik, 19, of Ansonia, Conn., a quiet, blonde boy, was assistant to the squad's biggest man, Private First Class William Radmilovich, Jr., 19, of Salem, Ohio. He and "Big Rad" handled one of the automatic rifles.

Chaplik was nearing the top of the ridge when we heard the snap of a Jap rifle. He gruffed. He kept moving, but his face was white. In the shelter of a ravine, our Navy medical corpsman went to work.

The bullet had torn a hole in Chaplik's arms. The arm dangled and the corpsman bandaged it and gave Chaplik a shot of morphine to ease the pain. He grinned and wished us luck.

We had to cross a ridge to work our way upward. One man slipped through, but he drew machine gun fire, a sharp stuttering sound. Private First Class Ralph W. Austill, 21, of Jerseyville, Ill., was next in line. He called to the automatic rifleman to cover him.

Big Rad and Private First Class Ralph A. Cline, 21, of 643 Watkins Street, Spartanburg, S. C., wormed their way to either flank. Austill darted forward, bent over. The machine gun fired. So did Big Red and Cline.

The Jap machine gunner, hidden in a cave, was silent now. Dead, we soon discovered. But Austill had been hit. He was lying in the open and sniper bullets hit the dust around him. A man from the squad to our left, who had joined us temporarily, moved toward Austill to pull him back. He was shot in the abdomen and the two men lay side by side.

The medical corpsman darted over the ridge. Our rifles and automatic weapons spouted in an effort to cover him, but the snipers sent their bullets close. He dragged Austill to safety, then returned with another Marine and rescued the second Leatherneck.

In the ravine, the corpsman bandaged their wounds and placed them with Chaplik. The wounded men joked about having company while waiting for the stretcher bearers. The corpsman told them he'd be seeing them in San Francisco.

As we squirmed upwards, Jap mortars started lobbing shells upon us. More were hit. A cocky Irish boy, got parts of a shell in his left leg. Again the corpsman went to work, ignoring the shelling. Wells, the squad leader from North Carolina, was watching a spot 30 yards ahead, fired. A Jap staggered to his feet and before he fell, Wells shot him again.

The squad moved ahead, slowly. Another series of mortar shells burst. We thought they had missed us, but Wells was hit in both legs.

While the corpsman worked on him, Willie Graves caught up with us.

"We're going to dig in here for the night, right on the ridge," he said. "Someone's got to go back for stretchers." He pointed to me and the photographer. "You two go. Tell 'em to hurry. Get going."

As we passed the wounded men, Chaplik suggested he go

A Dust Bowl on Saipan



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back with us. We helped him to his feet and he gamely tried a few steps, but the arm swung loosely and he bit his lips in pain. We laid him back and returned to the beach area.

Stretcher bearers were sent on their way after we showed them where to go. Then we rested on the beach, waiting impatiently for the outcome of the squad's mission.

We got the rest of the story much later from Big Rad. This is it:

The patrol dug in that night on the ridge. At midnight the Japs began dropping mortars again. The Marines hugged the ground and prayed. Early in the morning, two of them were hit and the corpsman fixed them up the best he could.

They were glad to see the sun rise that morning but the Japs started shelling again.

Willie Graves, the Mississippian, gave them the order to move back on the slope. He was killed as the Marines moved back.

"That second day we didn't do much," Big Rad reported. "We just stayed there, picking off any Japs that showed up. Then we got the word to move ahead. It was sunset. We all hated to go, but we did. One of the kids stood up and said, 'C'mon, you lugs, let's go.' So we followed him."

"We couldn't move far. The Japs were pretty thick, but we got some of them and didn't get hit ourselves. We felt pretty good when it got dark. The mortars let us alone that night."

"Next morning they got three more of our men. Me? Well, this morning a mortar landed close and tore the sole off my shoe. That's why I'm here now. I had to come for another pair and the captain told me to take a rest."

Big Rad took a final puff on his cigarette.

"I can't sleep, though, so I'm on my way back. There're some guys I got to see..."

Big Rad, rifle hugged close, walked off and disappeared up the road.

BEER TAXES
Raleigh, Oct. 10.—The State collected \$612,138.20 in beer taxes for the three-month period ended September 30, the first quarter of the 1944-45 fiscal year.

Figures, compiled by the Brewing Foundation's North Carolina Committee, disclosed that \$272,027.68 was collected in September, \$197,679.33 in August and \$142,432.19 in July.

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POSTWAR FARM SCIENCE TO ADVANCE
Schenectady, Oct. 9.—Because "during the war years there has been more research in agriculture than ever," Dr. William Pearson Tolley of Syracuse, N. Y., chancellor of Syracuse University, said in a General Electric Farm Forum address here that "in the postwar period the geneticists and plant breeders promise even greater advance."

"Colchicine promises to be as revolutionary in plant science as penicillin and the sulfa drugs are in the practice of medicine," he pointed out. "It double pacts inherited factors into plants, develops hybrids of exceptional vigor, hardiness and disease resistance, and greatly increases growth."

Dr. Tolley also mentioned that "our farmers know that after the war we shall have abundant supplies of cheap nitrogen. Thus our crop rotations and systems of farming may need restudy."

"The new world of plastics may also relate agriculture more closely to industry as the source of raw materials," he continued. "Wood lots or tree farms will be of increasing importance and more and more agricultural products will find pharmaceutical and industrial use."

No matter how the war develops this winter, supplies of summer clothes fabrics, particularly cottons, are expected to be short of demand in stores next spring, say clothing specialists of the USDA.

State acreage goals for rye harvest in 1945 totaling 2,515,000 acres for the country as a whole, are announced by War Food Administrator Marvin Jones.

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