**WWII Marine’s Story**



I was born on a farm in Artesian, South Dakota. No doctor in those days; a neighbor lady helped out. I went eight years to a one-room country school house. When I was graduated from eighth grade, I went to Artesian High School. I graduated in 1941; there were 17 of us in the class.

My dad was James Henry and my mom was Olive. Dad was a farmer. My mom worked on the farm too; she ended up with six children. Two of the girls passed away, one at two, the other at not quite a year. I had two other sisters and a brother; they’re all gone now.

I enlisted in the Marines at 19 about a year after I graduated from high school. Boot camp was in San Diego and infantry school at Camp Elliot. Then we sailed to New Zealand on the President Polk, a converted troop ship. It took us 30 days to get there and I was seasick about 30 days. Once I got ashore in the New Hebrides, I got over being seasick and was never seasick again. I spent about nine months at sea, going to different islands. We went on to New Zealand across the rough Tasmanian sea. We had to tie ourselves in our bunks.

We landed at Wellington, New Zealand. Couldn’t hardly understand the people down there. They put us on a truck to take to our companies. I was put in Charlie Company, First Battalion, Eighth Marines and stayed in the same platoon all during the war. We trained on New Zealand…with soap bullets! When we shot at each other, the bullets would explode and disappear. We had a 50-mile hike there, anybody that fell out didn’t get liberty. The CO of the second battalion turned around and walked back, his troops walked 100 miles in one day.

There were quite a few guys in the Second Marine Division who married New Zealand girls. Our company commander married a New Zealand girl. The commanding general had to put a stop to it. They liked us down there; very wonderful people.

We sailed for Tarawa. We shot our rifles into the ocean, did calisthenics to keep in shape. I didn’t know anything about war; I thought the way we were trained, we were going to go in and knock the hell out of them and they weren’t going to do anything. The first battalion was in reserve, but about ten am we got the word they were having difficulty ashore. We got in our Higgins boats and headed for shore.

Communications were just terrible in WWII. Nobody knew where in hell anybody was. We got to the line of departure and they couldn’t get in touch with us to tell us where to land. So, we sailed around in big circles waiting for orders. We sailed around in that circle all the rest of that day and all night. We had a chocolate D bar for rations. After I ate that thing I never ate chocolate for a year. We shot craps and played poker in the bottom of the Higgins boat.

They finally got orders for us about seven am to land on Red Beach Two. We got about 1000 yards from shore and a couple of anti-boat rounds exploded about 40 feet above us. I’m thinking *What the hell was that*? I thought it was shells from our ships. About 800 yards from shore the machineguns opened up on us. The coxswain on a Higgins boat doesn’t have any protection; he’s up there out in the open. At about 500 yards he wanted to turn the boat and go back. We wanted him to go in closer, but he dropped the ramp. He was a courageous young sailor and got us in as close as he could.

We jumped off and headed to shore. The machineguns were shooting at us; the first guy was shot through the head. There was blood all over. Before the war I was not a real religious person. But all of a sudden, I remembered my prayers, the Hail Mary. “Hail Mary, full of grace…pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” I was saying it as fast as I could; I didn’t know if I was going to be killed or not. I never thought, though, that they were going to kill me. But at Tarawa, I didn’t know what was going to happen. I was ducking under the water and I saw the bullets coming through the water.

There was a pier quite a ways off to our left. But it was some protection and I headed for it. I dropped into a hole that was over my head. I was trying to get out. My lieutenant, Bill Lundergan, grabbed me by the back of my dungaree jacket and lifted me out of that hole. He said, “Take it easy, Murph.” He was a wonderful guy; I never saw him again. I headed for that pier. About half way there a kid named Klyne was shot through the shoulder. He was hollering at the Japs, “You sons of bitches, you can’t kill me.” He didn’t have his weapon and he was just walking right in toward the island. I don’t know whether he made it or not.

I made the pier. There was an old troop transport out on the end of that pier. There were guys in that transport shooting at us. They called in Navy planes that strafed the ship. That pilot dropped a bomb right down the smoke stack of that ship. I don’t think there was any shooting from there anymore.

I followed the pier into the shore; I had guys get shot right by me. I saw a bullet hit a guy in the neck, he never knew he was shot. We were all charged up.

I got into the shore, I didn’t know anybody or what to do, just set up on the seawall. I walked by the only guy that had a working radio. The guy got a Congressional Medal of Honor for directing the attack. Robert Sherrod, the war correspondent, was in a dugout with him. I’m thinking, *Oh, boy, I’d love to get in there with them*.

I didn’t see any of my platoon, but I had my M-1. A guy gave us orders to get over this seawall and go after the Japs. I thought he was an officer. The Japs had the territory out in front of us. I didn’t know how the hell we were going to, but when we were told to do something in the Marine Corps, we did it. I never thought what was going to happen to me; I went over that wall, zig-zagging. I didn’t know who was on either side of me, but it was part of my platoon.

The bullets were flying all over, hitting in the sand and exploding. I don’t know why I wasn’t hit; I think it was divine intervention. You couldn’t see the bastards. They were dug in; I never saw a Jap on my way up there. I saw this big hole, probably made by a 16 incher. I dived into that hole. I was by myself and happy I got there. I wasn’t scared, I was pretty calm. I shot my M-1 and it was working after being in the water. I stayed up all night. I figured I’d shoot as many as I could if they came over, but nothing happened.

A Japanese plane came over in the middle of the night, we called him “Washing Machine Charlie.” He was shooting and dropped a bomb. Sand came on top of me where 50 calibers were hitting in the sand.

Morning came and I found my guys about 25 yards to my right. We were not far from the Japanese command post, a big damn place. Our shells couldn’t demolish it. Our engineers came up with satchel charges and flame throwers. They got up there and blew the satchel charges, then shot the flame throwers. A lot of Japs came running out and we shot them. That is a lot of the way Tarawa was taken, with satchel charges and flame throwers. They didn’t show themselves; that’s how we got them.

It went on that day and that night. They didn’t attack, I don’t think they had enough left. The Sixth Marines had landed on the south end of the island. They came up behind them Japs and they shot a lot of them too. The whole thing was over in about 76 hours. Somebody threw a grenade in one of the holes and a little Japanese boy, about two, came crawling out. He wasn’t wounded. A little kid was there, but I didn’t see any women. It took a lot of brave suckers to take that island. We went right into machinegun fire. I don’t know how anybody could send young marines to go into a place like that to die. They had every advantage on us. They thought we could get them and we ended up doing it. It was almost like divine intervention.

Bulldozers was digging trenches and they wanted us to drag them Jap bodies to them. It’s hot on Tarawa and I guess there was quite a stench, but nothing bothered me. I was just so happy to be alive. It wasn’t long before they rounded up what was left of my company and got us off the island. But not before they raised the flag on a tree. We were one of the first companies off the island.

We got on board ship. A guy was hollering, “I’m Blind.” The sergeant said, “Turn on the damn lights,” and the guy could see. I had a nightmare that the Japs came back on the island and attacked us. They were going to burn us up. I was going to surrender; I wasn’t going to be burned up. I saw how we burned them guys up. I took the teeth from one big Japanese in a tobacco pouch.

I was young and cocky, but all that was gone for me after Tarawa. We went to Pearl Harbor. People were throwing candy up to us. Admiral Nimitz came on board.  We went to the big island and had a tent camp. There were a number of Japanese locals. We weren’t too crazy about that; we were used to killing them. We had to be a little careful, but I don’t remember any of our guys killing them.

We got cold at night, but we found out where the blankets were. One thing about the Marine Corps, if we needed something we’d steal it!

That’s where I took infantry training. We had live ammunition. Of course, it had to be overhead fire. We laid out bright panels in front of our lines so the “enemy” would be far enough ahead of us that the planes could see them and know where to shoot. But they shot and killed a few guys, they were ``````reported as killed in action. We had wonderful training there with live ammo, but I didn’t especially like it; I didn’t like being shot over. They used the water-cooled machineguns and I thought they might not be that sturdy. We didn’t have electricity at camp Tarawa, we had candles. We used to take a pump fire extinguisher, put it into a tent and squirt the candles out.

We got one day in Honolulu and had to be back on the USS Monrovia by night to sail to Saipan. We had a Navy Chief come by. He said, “All you Marines get all the glory back home. What the hell, you are not winning this war all by yourselves.” On June 15th, 1944 we landed on Saipan. Morning came and they called us for breakfast. My buddy John Donovan and I had just come up on deck with our packs on and we were ready to get in the Amtracs and go ashore.  This was the first time we had seen the island. And I thought to myself that I might get wounded on this one. I don’t understand it, but something told me they’re not going to kill me. It might sound nuts, but I was not afraid. I slept like a baby the night before. My motto was that we were going to kill them and they weren’t going to kill us. My buddy John Donovan from Memphis Tennessee was a hell of a brave guy and a wonderful friend. We were best buddies in war. John said, “If they get me, I want to fall facing the enemy.”

Just then, that chief came up and said, “What are we doing in this close? They could shoot at us from here.” I looked at him and said, “We’re going to land there in a couple of minutes. Do you want to come along and get some of that glory?” He took off down below in a hurry.

We headed in towards the island. The battlewagons, the cruisers, the destroyers and the gunboats were all firing. You could see the 16-inchers going through the air.

We go 150 yards from shore and here come a Navy dive bomber and another plane. They were strafing. One of the planes got shot down, boom! I think it was a shell from one of the ships. The other one got hit by Japanese fire, the two of them bailed out from that plane over the ocean.

Our Amtrac (Amphibious Tractor) got caught up on a coral reef. He was swaying it back and forth, but he couldn’t get it off. The Japanese were shooting at us with artillery; it didn’t take them long to see that we were hung up. I’m thinking that I’m a survivor. I climbed up the side of that Amtrac, it’s about seven feet. I got up there and saw we were about 100 yards from shore. I was a Browning Automatic Rifleman (BAR) and I had 260 rounds of ammunition. I looked at the ocean. It was probably over my head. And I’m thinking 260 rounds of ammunition and the BAR. We also carried our rations, a poncho and a couple pairs of socks. It was too much weight, so I had to climb back down. My heart sank. The damn Japs were getting closer and closer. I think my whole platoon was in there. I was laying there saying my prayers. “He was almost scared stiff.” Well, that’s the truth; I was almost scared stiff. Suddenly, two of the shells hit right in back of the Amtrac and blew us off that reef. We were maybe 30 yards off that reef and a whole cluster of shells came in right where we had been. We were about 20 seconds from being blown to pieces.

We got into shore. My Lieutenant was, Mr. Stewart (George Stewart. I had so much respect for him I never called him anything except Mr. Stewart). He jumped off the port side and I jumped off the starboard side. Then we were on shore. The Japs were shooting at us with everything they had. They were shooting at the Amtrac going back for more troops; you could see the shells going over our heads. I saw several shells that didn’t explode. Mr. Stewart said, “Come on guys. Let’s get the hell off of this beach.”

In we went, zig zagging forward. We got about 50 yards and there was kind of a swamp there. A machinegun got us pinned down. They couldn’t see us because of the grass in this marshy area. My buddy, Manley Lee Salmon from Bethany, Missouri was next to me. He was a great guy, we called him “Sal.” He said, “Murph, I’m hit.” I’m thinking what they hell were we going to be able to do about it. Then Sal says, “Murph, I’m getting sick.” My buddy, John Donovan was lying to my left. He says, “Murph, we gotta do something.” I pulled out my poncho and we put him on it. Four of us each grabbed a corner. There was a little lull and we got him to the beach. I had to leave my BAR to carry Sal out. The medics took over, but he didn’t make it. He died aboard ship. That’s the hardest part about my operations. I lost more guys on Saipan than anywhere.

Night come on and I’m looking around for a place to get into a hole. There was this big shell hole with six of my buddies in it already. I says, “You got room in there for me?” They said, “No, Murph, there’s not room for you.” I went about 30 yards away and dug a hole, hardly big enough to cover my body. The Japs shelled us all night long. I picked up a carbine, there’s always weapons laying around.

The next morning, they hollered, “All BAR men to the front, we’re having a tank attack.” I didn’t have my BAR, but I ran up there anyway. We had a bazooka man, he shot that damn track right off that light tank. No Jap came out of that tank. We were waiting. He probably came out after dark.

Mr. Stewart said, “Okay, Guys, we gotta get going. We have to join the Fourth Marine Division over to our right.” There was this ridge between us. We got the platoon together. Just as we left, the Doc (Navy Corpsman) says, “All of your buddies was killed in that fox hole.” These were my buddies. There just wasn’t room for me in there. The fact is, two of them crawled out of there. One of them was Joe Shanks who helped me carry Sal. They were seriously wounded but survived. The other four were killed.

We headed up to what we called “Shrapnel Ridge.” There were guys off to our left who were hurting and in pain. They were hollering for help and I was going to go over. Mr. Stewart says, “Murph, they got their own help over there; they’ll take care of them.”

We kept going. Near the top of the ridge it was getting dark; time for rations. One guy who was going to go down for rations said, “Murph, let me take your carbine, it’s lighter, and you take my M1.” I said okay, so I got the M1, but not his cartridge belt. It had eight rounds in it. All of a sudden, a guy named Ratliff off to our right said, “They’re a coming, they’re a coming.” I saw this big Jap, no further than my neighbor’s house across the street. I shot him three times in the chest. A couple of them attacked Ratliff and killed him; the other guys killed them.

I got behind a rock. I could see just a bit of a helmet of one of them. I’m waiting for him to get his head over further. I was concerned because there were only five rounds left in my M1. A guy over to my left shot and knocked the helmet off him. They must have thought it wasn’t a good idea to come because they didn’t.

It was night and we had our rations. Mr. Steward said there was nobody on our right flank. The 29th Marines were supposed to be there. “I want somebody with a Browning Automatic over there.” I got one from another guy and went on over. Another guy, Spearman, came with me. We always had two men in a foxhole; it was an hour on and an hour off. It was about ten and it was my time to rest. We heard something coming. He was right on top of us. I pulled the trigger on my BAR and blew him backwards. The BAR stopped at 14, or I’d have shot him more. He was going to get us with a bayonet.

The next day the guys said, “Murph, that guy’s got a mouthful of gold teeth. You want ‘em?” I said no, I didn’t want no part of it. That was the good Lord talking to me, telling me it wasn’t the right thing to do. I had lost the bag of teeth I had from Tarawa. Funny how you change.

That morning, I went down to see if the 29th Marines were there and saw a group of guys coming up. The Japs started coming down the ridge and they jumped on the leader of this group. I imagine it was their platoon leader. I was about 100 yards away and I was sick that I couldn’t shoot when four or five came after him. But I knew if I shot I’d probably kill him too. They jumped on him and he swung them bodily and threw them. He had superhuman strength; he was fighting for his life. He threw four of them. He yelled to me, “If them sons-of-bitches don’t keep up with me, shoot ‘em!” He was telling me to shoot his own men. What a strong, brave sucker he was. His men came up then.

I went back to my outfit. That night, three Japanese planes came over to bomb the ships. The ships were shooting with everything, I’ve never seen fireworks like it. They never knocked even one of them down, but they didn’t drop a bomb.

That was the first few days on Saipan.  Members of the Fourth saw up on the ridge and shot at us. We didn’t have no communications and they thought we were the enemy. They shot a little short; we got the hell out of there. Someone got through and told them we were fellow Marines. Finally, the Fourth Division came up where they should be, so we swung around and went over to take Saipan. The 27th Army Infantry Division came in behind the Fourth Division.

I met an Indian named Fred Miller from up in Wisconsin. On New Zealand, he said, “Well, boys, don’t worry about it. When it’s your time to go, you’ll go.” The line got held up. I was under a coconut tree and the Japs fired knee mortars at us. One hit the top of the tree and really rattled me. We couldn’t see them; the Japanese were the best at camouflage that ever was. A few shells landed not too far from Fred. He said, ‘’I’m going to go back and see what the hell is holding us up.” One of the guys hollered, “Don’t worry about it, Fred, when it’s your time to go, you’ll go!” (Laughs.)

The Army general wanted to fire artillery and soften the Japanese up for a couple of days before he moved up. Well, that wasn’t the Marine Corps’ way. The Marine Corps wanted to keep going. Hit them every day.

We get up there just at the edge of Mount Tapochau. A bunch of Japs had dug holes there, right in a perfect spot to stop anybody from coming up. It’s not good to fight uphill. They had a lot of foxholes and them Japs was all in there, all dead, not a mark on them. I made sure that they were dead, I shot a couple. I didn’t know, but if artillery hits close enough to you it does something to your lungs and you don’t have a mark on you. Those four guys who got killed where I was going to be didn’t have a mark on them either. I don’t know who the hell shot the artillery fire, but I’m mighty glad they did. Maybe the Army or the Tenth Marines, our artillery outfit, I don’t know. I was very grateful for whoever it was.

We were near the peak. On the way down there was an area that wasn’t easy to get out where they needed our mortar fire. We were right on the edge of it and the mortars were coming down all night. That was the only time I saw anybody crack up in the Marine Corps. A couple of mortars landed in our lines and killed guys. A couple of guys near it had to be taken back. That was a terrible night. I don’t know why, I never, ever come close to cracking up.

We were going down and there was this valley. The company commander decided we needed a patrol to go out there and check it out. The only time we knew where the Japanese were was when they shot at us. We saw them by the smoke. When we saw where they were, their ass was gone! It was Fred Miller’s group. If something was going on, I wanted to know what, to be where the action was, so I volunteered to go with them. I had a buddy, Tex Hester When I told him I was going, he never said a word, but the look on his face said, “Murph, you’re nuts.” (Laughs.) But that’s the way I was.  So away we went. We got almost up the other side and we hadn’t seen nothing. All of a sudden, a guy with a Lewis gun (probably captured from the British) off to my right opened up, probably 100 yards. They shot at me and I went down like a rock. The rounds had hit right by my toes, hell of a racket. You talk about something that will shake you up? I know they thought they killed me. I’m think I gotta see where those guys are; if you just lay there they can walk right up on you and shoot you. I was in a little swale. I crawled up it and there I saw them. They were shooting at our company behind me. There was a machinegun nest about 50 yards to the left. It was made out of real sturdy stuff. The Lewis gun was there to protect the machinegun nest from anybody coming at it from the side or the back. The nest was only so wide so they only had a certain angle where they could shoot. I saw the smoke from the Lewis gun.

I got as low to the ground as I could, because I knew if I missed them, they could get me. I took really good aim. I got that sight on the Lewis gun and fired a burst of about six and they were dead. I had tracers so I could see my bullets went right into them. About ten minutes after I shot the Lewis gun, a guy come crawling out of the pillbox, all camouflaged. I shot him. He was going over to get on the Lewis gun. So, I killed the Lewis gun and the machinegun nest couldn’t shoot at me; I was outside their field of fire. But I could shoot at them and I shot probably 240 rounds into the nest. They were still shooting when I ran out of ammunition.

Mr. Stewart came running up and asked, “Murph, what are you shooting at?” I showed him. That machinegun was a dead pigeon because he had no protection to the right or back. We called up a tank and blew him out of there, but we could have done it with a couple of hand grenades. The company commander decided the guy that directed the tank should get a Silver Star, though there was no worry for him. The guys thought I should have gotten it, but I don’t care. Still don’t.

The next day we ran into another machinegun. I couldn’t tell where he was shooting from. I was right beside Mr. Steward, but we couldn’t see. If we went up there, guys were going to get killed. Mr. Stewart called back on the walkie-talkie. “Charlie One, this is Charlie two. We’re facing a machinegun, we can’t figure out where it is and we need a tank.” Charlie One says, “Stewart, move those men up or you’re no longer a lieutenant of mine.” Mr. Stewart slammed that walkie-talkie in the ground and said, “Okay, men, let’s go.” And away we went. The machinegun killed a number of guys in the third squad. That night, the company commander came up and said, “George! That’s the way to move your men up.” It was “George” then, not “Stewart.” That night our corpsman, Doc Youngblood, a great guy, came up and said, “Murph, I want to kill that son-of-a-bitch!” (The company commander.) He was so mad he couldn’t control himself. I said, “Doc, we can’t do it. We can’t kill him.” Maybe if I had seen the young men dying, but I hope I would have had enough brains not to. I think if I hadn’t stopped him, he’d have found a way.

We went on the next day, pretty close to the ocean. We had our line right up there from the ocean. A line of infantry, you ain’t got nobody back of you. We had machineguns and mortars, but they didn’t dig in on the line with us. Our foxholes were close together, no further than across the road. We got word. “You guys been in the lines all month. We’re going to bring up a battalion of the 27th Infantry Division to take over your lines. You’re going to go back down by Garapan.” It was a city but all torn to pieces.

We went down there. My buddy, K. K. Stinson (he was quite a character) and I put up a pup tent. The first night, we found these big bottles of Saki. This was not the real powerful stuff, but we got pretty drunk that night.

The Japs attacked the 27th Infantry. They killed that battalion that took our place and about as many Japs died too. We got called back up there. I think it was the only time in my life that I would have no mercy. I hated the Japanese like snakes. Mr. Stewart and I went up to knock out a pillbox. We told the tank where to shoot through the telephone on the back. There was one of the guys in that pillbox. I don’t know if he would have been able to live, but I just shot him. I had no mercy after seeing those guys with their throats cut.

We were running back to our lines and a piece of shrapnel from a 75 hit Mr. Stewart on the right hip and down he went. He says, “I’m hit, I’m hit!” He reached back and he had mercurochrome bottle. He thought that was blood. I pulled his pants down. He was all black and blue, but he wasn’t cut. I said, “Mr. Stewart, you’re not hit.” He said, “I’m not hit, I’m not hit,” pulled up his pants. His walkie-talkie went off. The company commander said, “Stewart, what’s happening? Move them men up!” Mr. Stewart said, “We’re moving right up, Sir.” He never said a damn word about getting hit. We went up and you couldn’t believe the bodies. A couple of Army guys were out in the ocean waving at us. Most of the American Army guys had their throats slit. They fought to the death. Probably a thousand soldiers and probably as many Japanese. It bothers me that we were taken out of that spot. We were seasoned guys, they were not. I’m sure we would have heard them coming and we had our artillery and mortars with the flares.

That was the end of Saipan. From Saipan, we went to Tinian about ten days later. It was too soon to go into combat again. The brass wanted us to go into Tinian that soon; they weren’t up there doing the fighting. It takes something out of you mentally and physically when you lose a lot of buddies.

So, I went into Tinian. That was really not a very bad island. First, we went up to Tinian Town to make a fake landing. One of our battleships had pulled in too close. They shot back and it hit the bridge. The commanding officer got killed. You should have seen that battle ship fire a broadside, it lists the battle ship. They turned around and let go with the other broadside. There wasn’t much left of whoever the hell shot at them.

Then we went to where we landed. It was a simple, no problem landing, nobody shooting at us. We dug in and all of a sudden, their artillery cut loose on us. I tell you we started digging, you could hear them old shovels clash! (Laughs.) they shelled us most of the night, but they were too short.

As far as actually combat, I didn’t see much until my last day there. As we were moving across the island, one guy thought he could get in a jeep and go. It was the stupidest damn thing. The Japs put a shell in front of his jeep. They made a U-turn in a hurry. He was an officer, but not from our outfit.

Tinian for us was pretty much the last two or three days. We started getting shot at and I was trying to figure out where it was. I thought it was coming from an old shack. I was shooting it full of holes, just standing up like old western days. We all got hit. I got shot through the wrist. One guy got shot through the nose, another through the arm, none of us got serious wounds. They were all from my group of men.

I had to go to the hospital because the bone was protruding out of my arm. The doctor tried to put me to sleep. He said, “Count to four.” I got to 25 or 26 and I said, “Doc, nothing’s going to work on me. I just come from the front lines and I’m all charged up.” So, he used sodium pentothal. I got to four and I was done for. I was put on a hospital ship, the USS Relief. They thought my wound was worse than it was. The nurse on there was Miss Perkins, a gorgeous creature. (Laughs)

One of the guys was shot in the leg, he had a broken foot. He said, “Murph, if they tell you you can’t jump on a broken foot, tell them they are full of crap.” They thought this Jap was killed, and this other Murphy wanted a saber and pistol he had. The Jap shot him and he jumped out of that hole. His buddy, Dale Francis Johnson (who killed the guy who shot me) got that saber and pistol and put them on Murphy’s stretcher. Murphy told the nurse, Miss Perkins, that the cast was too tight, you better loosen it up or I’m going to cut it off with my saber. There was a Doctor O’Sullivan there. She told him that and O’Sullivan bought his saber from him for $250 and I think he bought the pistol too. The next night, Murphy says to me, “There’s a Texas movie, a western, on deck.” He was from Texas. “Will you help me get up the stairs? I gotta see that movie.” We got up there, saw the movie, and got back down. Doctor O’Sullivan saw the dirt on his cast and said, “You been on this cast. You can’t be doing that.”

The next day, there was another western. So, I helped him up there again. Doctor O’Sullivan found us and, boy, we had to get down out of there. No more movies!

You wouldn’t believe what it takes to kill a young person. One guy was shot through the front of his body and the bullet came out his back. It left about a six-inch hole. All the nurse could do was put in gauze and sulfur powder. All we had in WWII was sulfur powder. You could see his lungs down there.

We went to Pearl Harbor to the Naval Hospital, and oh, man, we were happy to be there. If they thought you might have a severed nerve, the way they could tell was to hold a cigarette close to the wound. If you jerked away from that cigarette, they knew your nerve was okay. I saw it. They did this when we were sleeping.

I was there less than a month. My wrist was popped out of its socket. They pushed it back in and it healed up real good. All of us guy that wasn’t too seriously wounded got shipped back to our outfits. I got put on board the USS Cape Gloucester. It was a concrete ship, made out of cement. It was the strangest damn thing you ever saw; the Army was in control of that ship. It got dead in the water for three days. They had a Naval gun crew on board. They were taking wounded Marines back to their outfits. They fed us stew for breakfast and supper, and an apple or orange for dinner. I had a Buddy and he managed to get me up to the galley. The sailors could have steaks or anything they wanted. The wounded Marines, the guys that were fighting the damn war, got stew. They took us back to Tinian.

The first thing I heard was that there was nobody in that shack I was shooting at. (Laughs.) It was a machinegun over on the left shooting at us. Johnson got him. My buddy wanted to get a ride on an airplane. We got a flight going down to Guam. They said they had no parachutes for us, but we could hitch a ride. It was a B-24 Liberator. They asked if we could fire the 50 caliber waist guns. I said sure. I had never shot a 50 caliber in my life. They are supposed to have stops on them, but they didn’t. I got pretty damn close to the tail. We got to Guam and I told the pilot I was pretty close to shooting off part of your tail. The pilot wasn’t excited. He said it might have been a little harder to land.

We went to Okinawa. They invaded that place on Easter Sunday. Our job was to make a fake landing. I volunteered to be in the fake landing. I wanted to get the hell off the ship because the damn kamikazes were flying all around hitting ships. We got close enough they were shooting at us. Three Navy planes did a perfect job laying down a smoke screen. We got the hell out of there. I’m thinking “What the hell did I volunteer for?”

We went back to Saipan. We were training to be the first troops in Japan. I saw the very beach I was going to land on. It was a nice beach.

Then they called us up to take over small islands off Okinawa, Aguni and Iheya, Iheya first. It was undefended, they had gone to Okinawa. It would have been tough. Then we went to Aguni. I sprained my ankle jumping out of the Amtrac. On Aguni a big guy ran after us and I shot him. I wish I hadn’t, he wasn’t armed.

We came to a shack. This other guy heard a noise under the floor and was going to shoot down there. I said, “Hold up, let’s see what’s down there.” It was an old man and an old woman; they wanted to die together. We had the guys take them back. We chased one Japanese across the island. When we got to the end, he jumped off the cliff.

Aguni was infested with fleas; we could not come aboard ship until we got all of our clothes washed.

Then we went to Okinawa. We went through some dangerous territory, but that was the end of their resistance. We were on the southeast of the island in the area where Simon Buckner got killed. We might have shot some of the last shots of the war, down at caves in the ocean.

We went back to Saipan and started training to invade Japan. They told us they had to have seasoned troops. I’m very fortunate that the war ended, August 14, 1945. We didn’t believe it until the company commander called us out and told us. I felt I had a 60-pound bag taken off my back and off my mind. Some older guys started crying, “I’m going to get to see my mother again.”

We were the first troops into Japan after the war; we went up with full combat equipment on. We were told to treat them like they were civilians in the United States. They were standing at the dock and they bowed down. They had their weapons piled up there. Our orders were to take their weapons and send them home. We were kind of free to do what we felt like; chase those Japanese girls around. I walked through where the atomic bomb landed in Nagasaki; I wish I hadn’t, because now I have prostate cancer from the radiation. I get a benefit from the government.

I sailed for home and arrived at Long Beach. I kissed the soil, I was so glad to get home. My discharge was at Camp Pendleton. A Sergeant in nice khaki uniform says, “Hey, Mac, how’d you like to sign over?”  I said, “You can take this fucking outfit and shove it up your ass!” He said, “Oh, that’s an awful way to talk.” I said, “If you’d been where I’ve been the last three years, you’d feel the same way.” I was used up.

I’ve got a lot of pictures of my buddies. I remember all their names and where they were from.

I love the Marine Corps as far as the men go. But I told the guy the equipment we had to fight with was no good, that it’s ridiculous to send guys out to fight in those Amtracs. We had to climb out of them, crawl over the side and jump down about seven feet. And what do you think the Japs were doing? Waiting for us. You’ve seen photos of them at Tarawa, those poor guys hanging on them. Our equipment was great, except for the Amtracs.

I took a train home to Illinois. My mother and father were both from South Dakota, but when he passed away, she moved back here to Illinois. After high school, I was working for a farmer out there, but I moved to Rockford and went to work for J. L. Clark Manufacturing. I enlisted from Rockford.

I went back to work for J. L. Clark, a great company. I worked real hard for them for about 12 years, lifting 15 or 20 tons of steel a day. After that, I became a tool and die hardener, which was an easy job. I finally ended up being a tool maker for them.  I was with them 38 years and retired from them.

I met Lois at a dance. She was Miss Belvidere 1948 Home Coming Queen; very pretty. We’ve been together 70 years.

Lois: Yeah, get to the important part!

Bill: In 1948, we got married. August 14th, the same day the war ended, only three years later.

We have four children, two boys and two girls: Teresa, Mike, Tim, and Amy. We have eight grandchildren, now we’re going on great grandchildren, we got about eight of them. I love my grandchildren; that’s what I live for. God has been good to us.

After the service, I went to Coyne Institute in Chicago to learn radio and television repair. I worked part time for Hendrick’s Electric Company, wonderful people. Sometimes when I got out of Clarks, I go and repair radios and televisions. And I farmed a little bit, too. (Laughs.) I’m a jack of all trades, master of none. Lois took care of the kids. Thank God for that; she had three of them in short order. We are a very close family. LOVE IS THE ANSWER!

I went to the VA in Rockford about three years ago, but I don’t get any medical care from them. They sent me to this cancer doctor here in Rockford, and the government pays him.

I belong to the Old Corps; I have wrung more salt out of my socks than you have sailed on. But I have a lot of confidence in our young Marines. I still think the same way as I did right after the war. I want the United States to remain a powerful nation, but I don’t want the United States telling other people how to live.