Soldier's Story

Bartholomew "Bert" Flanigan
World War II

U.S.M.C. BAR Rifleman







WFA Okinawa 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines lst Marine Division

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Soldier's Story research is based on information from documented sources and shares a bit of Bert's life and World War II experiences.

Rifleman's Creed

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life.

I must master it as I must master my life.

My rifle, without me, is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me.

I will...

My rifle and myself know that what counts in this war are not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, nor the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count.

We will hit...

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strength, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will ever guard it against the ravages of weather and damage as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes and my heart against damage. I will keep my rifle clean and ready. We will become part of each other.

We will...

Before God, I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy, but peace!



Bartholomew "Bert" Aloysious Flanigan was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on March 15, 1908. His father, James, was a railroad engineer responsible for a train's speed, direction, and braking. His mother, Lucy, cared for Bert and his little sister, Carolyn.

In high school, Bert played golf and took courses that included geometry, chemistry, and physics. He would graduate at 19 in 1927. He then studied business at Temple University in Philadelphia for two years, where he took courses in business administration, and his greatest interest was in commercial business.

Pictured above left is Market Street in 1920s Philadelphia as Bert would have known it. Above right is Temple University's Conwell Hall, where Bert would have gone for university admissions.



By 1930, Bert was 22 and married to Ruth Bristow. He lived in his father-in-law's Philadelphia house at the peak of the Great Depression while working as an insurance adjustment tracer responsible for tracking the progress of a claim. He would later work for \$25 a week as a general office clerk at Snellenburg & Company in Philadelphia. Snellenburg's was a middle-class department store and wholesale clothing manufacturer. In 1936, he worked as a spare hand for \$50 a week at Petrol Corporation located at 49th & Schuylkill in Philadelphia, where he loaded, unloaded, and stored petroleum products such as gasoline and crude oil on a tank truck farm. A Petrol Corporation Dodge tank truck that Bert would have serviced is pictured top left. As a hobby, Bert enjoyed repairing his home's electrical utilities.

By 1940, Bert was 5 feet 7 1/2 inches and 154 pounds with blue eyes, brown hair, and a light complexion. He was now Living with Ruth and their two-year-old daughter Barbara at 5352 Irving Street in Philadelphia, pictured top right.

The Great War had been over for 22 years. Life was rather mundane for Bert. Franklin D. Roosevelt became the nation's third-term president and, during a fireside radio chat, declared that the United States must become "the great Arsenal of Democracy." The Cincinnati Reds defeated the Detroit Tigers to win the World Series championship in baseball.

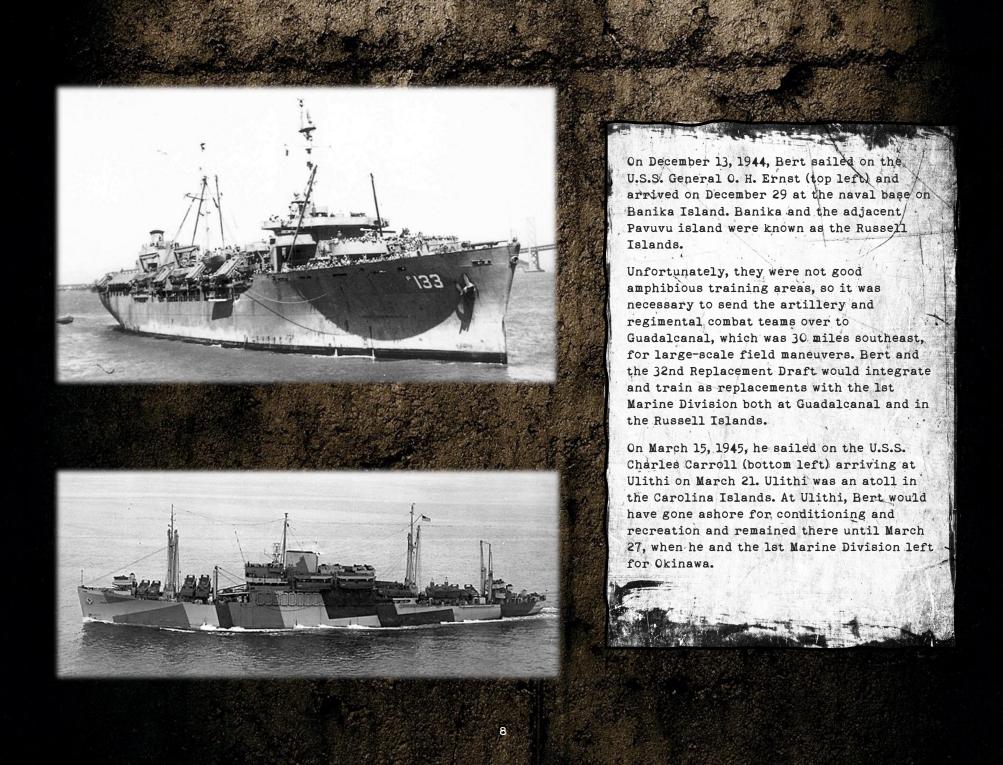
The fires of war were rapidly spreading across Europe. The Battle of Britain began in October 1940 between England and Germany. Bert was 32, and life must have seemed very routine. He would get up early, go to work, and hope he didn't get sick because he had a wife and young child to take care of. "All for one" and "Semper Fi" would have seemed quite distant. Bert could only depend on himself, not others. Each paycheck was a good day.



As surprised as he must have been, on May 24, 1944, Bert (top left) was drafted into the Marine Corps as a Private. By July 1944, he was assigned to the Tenth Recruit Battalion and subsequently to the Rifle Range Detachment on Parris Island, South Carolina. On July 11, 1944, Bert qualified as a marksman, followed by the bayonet on July 22. His rifle skills were excellent, and the classification officer recommended him to be a Rifle Ranger because he was a Rifleman who had achieved a high level of proficiency. On August 9, Bert became a Rifle Coach. He was promoted to Private First Class on-September 2, and on October 27, he transferred to the 4th Training Battalion at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

On November 6, Bert was assigned to the 32nd Replacement Draft, which was replacements for the First Marine Division. Most of the First Marine Division veterans had been sent home after serving overseas for nearly thirty months, righting at Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and Peleliu. Over 8,000 replacements, such as Bert, needed to be trained in only four months for the Okinawa invasion.

Pictured top right, during World War II, Marines train on the Parris Island rifle range, a place very familiar to

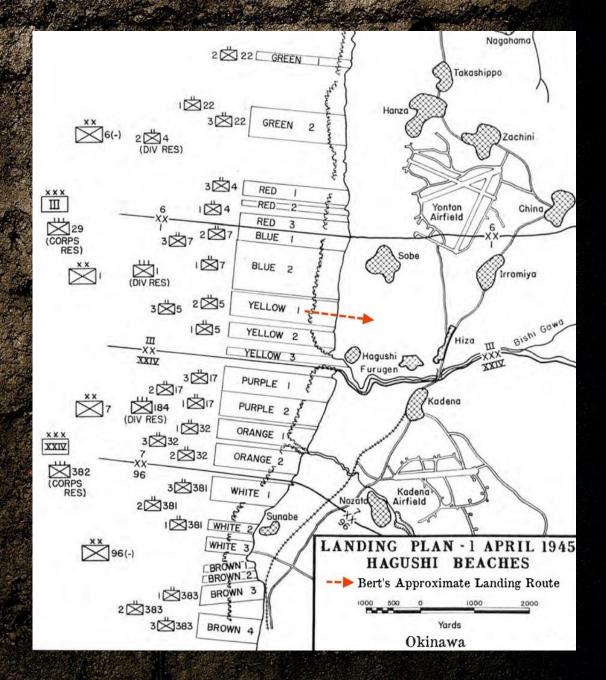




On Love Day, April 1, 1945, the weather was ideal with calm seas and a moderate breeze. At 0510, the U.S.S. Charles Carroll reached Okinawa and began preparations to launch the assault troops. Out of the morning darkness, Bert would have seen the explosive firepower tearing into the landing beaches as the convoy ships and assault planes launched their attacks. In the distance, the burning fires and their smoky mist would have given Bert a sobering moment to reflect on how he would soon be entering this fiery mess and if he would ever see his wife, Ruth, and daughter, Barbara, again.

Before noon, Bert boarded his assigned armored amphibious tractor. The amphibious tractors would loop around in circles before lining up and then head toward the beaches, similar to the above landing on Okinawa. The offshore reef added difficulty, causing some tractors to be lost, but fortunately, there was minimal enemy resistance as Bert approached Yellow Beach 1 with the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines (2/5).

As 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines (2/5) Corpsman Robert Bush recalled, their landing plan was to use ladders to get over the beach seawall. But when they reached the seawall, it had already been blown up by the battleships. The 2/5 expected all kinds of hazards but were only approached by an old Japanese man. Because no one knew what to expect, rifleman Private Clyde Peddy of Company G was ordered to shoot him. It was the first dead man they had seen. Clyde shot the old man three times. Later that day, Clyde took a bullet in the right side of his chest and died. Corpsman Bush thought, "You live by the sword and die by the sword." Clyde was buried in the First Marine Division Cemetery, Grave 9, Plot 1.





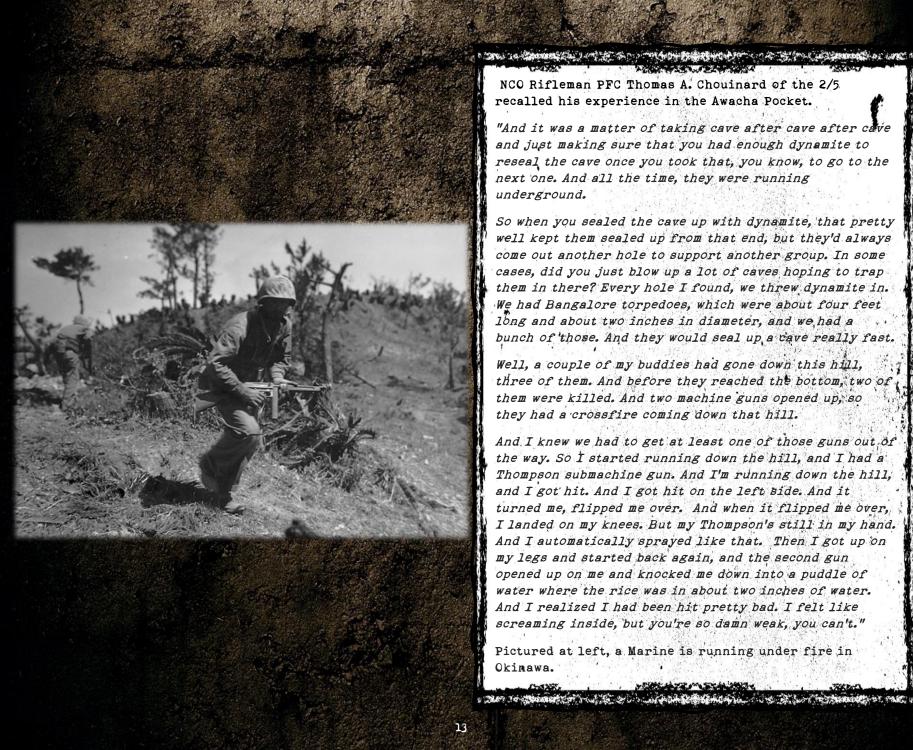
The advance inland was rapid. Only a few scattered Japanese troops, as pictured above, remained in the area, and they were quickly taken care of. Bert and the 2/5 would move to the far right of the Yontan Airfield and rapidly push across the central part of the island.

Over the next several days, they continued moving east and encountered little resistance as they pursued the enemy. By April 8, they had passed through Heanna and would spend the next several weeks securing the four little islands: Ike Shima, Taka Banare Shima, Heanza Shima, and Hamahiki Shima.

On May 1, 1945, they moved southwest towards Uchitomari and then continued south-central towards the Awacha Pocket, as shown below, to relieve the Army's 106th Infantry. The Awacha Pocket was northeast of Dakeshi and consisted of tangled gorges and dangerously steep hills.

On May 2, inside the Awacha Pocket, Bert and the 2/5 had moved out about two hundred yards, but their positions became untenable due to heavy fire from their left rear and front. To probe the front for possible routes of attack and to further determine enemy resistance, reconnaissance patrols were sent out. They were immediately hit with small arms and knee mortar fire from higher ground.





NCO Rifleman PFC Thomas A. Chouinard of the 2/5 recalled his experience in the Awacha Pocket.

"And it was a matter of taking cave after cave after cave and just making sure that you had enough dynamite to reseal the cave once you took that, you know, to go to the next one. And all the time, they were running underground.

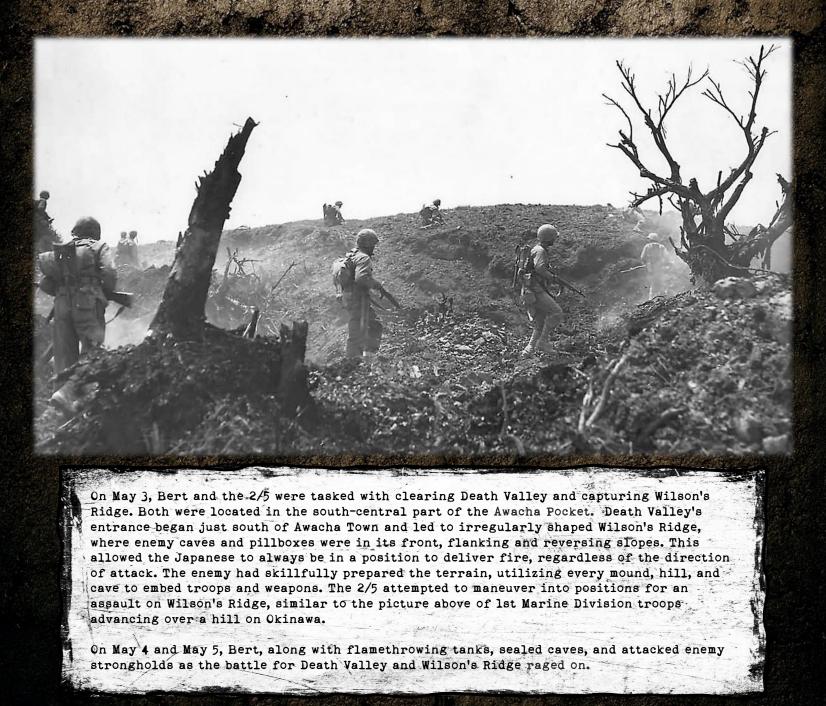
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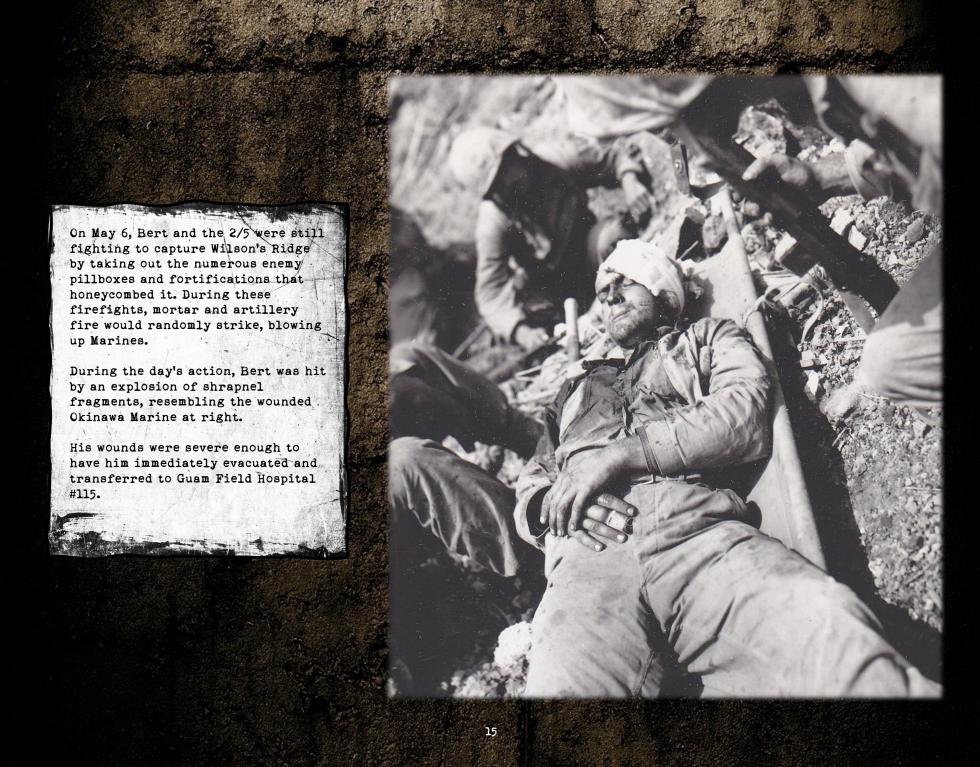
So when you sealed the cave up with dynamite, that pretty well kept them sealed up from that end, but they'd always come out another hole to support another group. In some cases, did you just blow up a lot of caves hoping to trap them in there? Every hole I found, we threw dynamite in. We had Bangalore torpedoes, which were about four feet long and about two inches in diameter, and we had a bunch of those. And they would seal up a cave really fast.

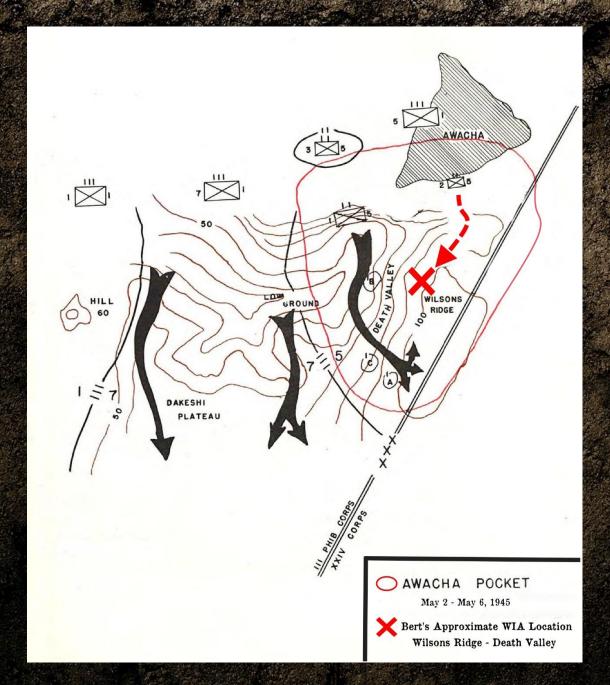
Well, a couple of my buddies had gone down this hill. three of them. And before they reached the bottom, two or them were killed. And two machine guns opened up, so they had a crossfire coming down that hill.

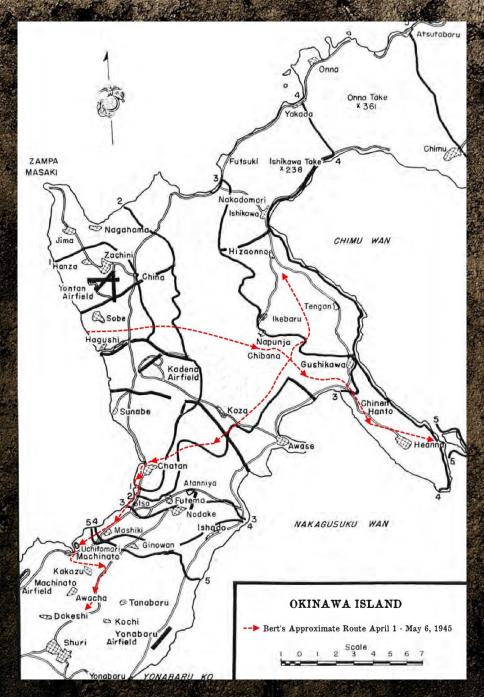
And I knew we had to get at least one of those guns out of the way. So I started running down the hill, and I had a Thompson submachine gun. And I'm running down the hill. and I got hit. And I got hit on the left side. And it turned me, flipped me over. And when it flipped me over, I landed on my knees. But my Thompson's still in my hand. And I automatically sprayed like that. Then I got up on my legs and started back again, and the second gun opened up on me and knocked me down into a puddle of water where the rice was in about two inches of water. And I realized I had been hit pretty bad. I felt like screaming inside, but you're so damn weak, you can't."

Pictured at left, a Marine is running under fire in Okinawa.











Still recovering from his wounds, in June 1945, Bert would be back in the States with Casual Company in Seattle, Washington. Unfortunately, his wounds did not fully heal and developed skin tuberculosis. He would be Honorably Discharged on January 26, 1946.

Bert returned home to his wife Ruth and daughter Barbara. He hoped to find work as a Plant Manager.

By 1950, Bert was working as an auditor for Cities Service Corporation in Yeadon, Pennsylvania. He would later hold the elected public office of the Constable in Yeadon.

Bert survived the war, but sadly, the long-term effects from his wounds proved insurmountable. On July 2, 1962, at only 54, he died of a heart attack, likely caused by the damage from skin tuberculosis. He was buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in Yeadon, Pennsylvania (pictured above).

Bert, thank you for your great personal sacrifice for our freedom. You lived a life of honor, and you served your country well.

Appendix of Sources

- 1. Year: 1920; Census Place: Philadelphia Ward 44, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Roll: T625, 1645; Page: 1B; Enumeration District: 1653.
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- 4. Photograph 5352 Irving Street, Philadelphia, PA 19139. Courtesy of Daniel J Demers.
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- 19. Thomas A. Chowinard. World War, 1939-1945 Personal Narratives. Library of Congress. Thomas Chouinard Collection. https://www.doc.gov/item/afc2001001.73179/.

Appendix of Artifacts

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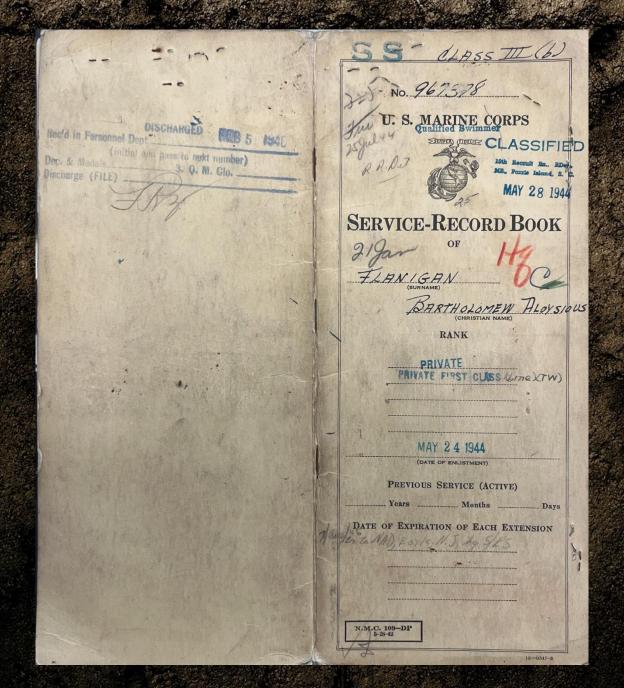
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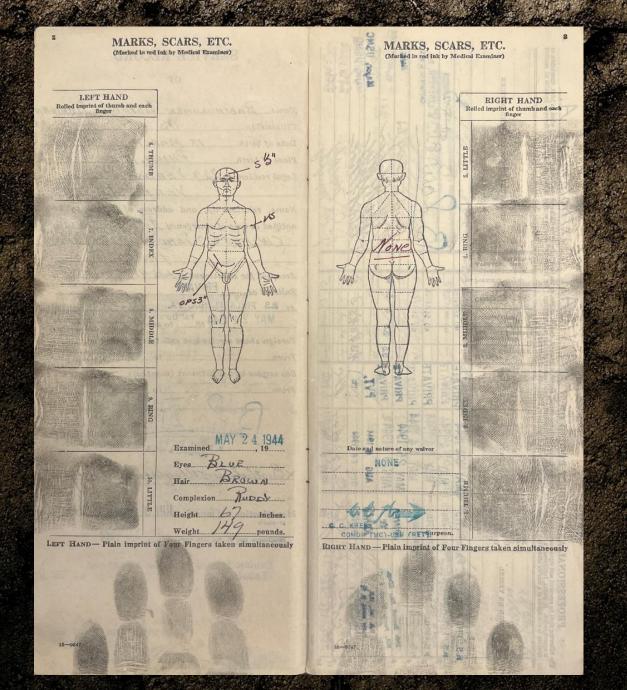
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PROFESSIONAL AND CONDUCT RECORD OF FLANIGAN Bortholomen A. The following shall be executed and signed semiannually and whenever the marine is transferred, retired, discharged, deserts, or dies, or the book is closed for discharge; also (without markings) when he joins, surrenders, or is apprehended. (0, Bad; 1, Indifferent; 2, Fair; 3, Good; 3.8, Very Good; 4.3 to 5, Excellent.) Semiannual markings and markings "For Discharge" shall be entered in red ink. Military Efficiency includes all matters relating to the duties of a marine other than Neatness and Military Bearing, Intelligence, Obedience, and Sobriety. JOINED. SURR., APP., TRANSF., SEMI-AN., FOR DIS., FINAL M., DESERTED, DIED, RETIRED, DISCHARGED, TRANSF. TO RESERVE SIGNATURE OF COMMANDING OFFICER NEATNESS MILITARY STATION OR VESSEL DATE RANK MAY 2 4 1944 S. PHILADELPHIA. PA INDUCTED PRIVATE R.S. PHILADELPHIA. NO SERVICE DISCHARGE PRIVAT PHILADE PHIA PAENLISTED B. LANDRETH, 3rd. MAY PRIVATE NO SERVICE CAPTAIN U. S. M. C. R. PHILADELPHIA, PATRANSFERRE 9 NO SERVICE PRIVATE MAY 25 1944 Majes PRIVATE 10th Recept Ray EDep. JOINED Captain, USMCR MB., Parris Island, S. C. 4 5 5 1944 PRIVATE 3.5 Tr RA DE ME PVT. Major, USMC AUG @ 1944 JOINES Partis Island, S. C. Major, USMC OCT 26 1944 Ptc 4.34.34.55 TRANSE Tot Lt USMG THE LE USING

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32ND REPLACEMENT DRAFT

California, and sailed therefrom 14 December, 1944; arrived and disembarked at Banika, Russell Islands, B.S.I., on 29 December, 1944.

A. H. COOK.

CWO., USMC.

Adjutant.

Emb abd U.S.S. CARROL at Banika, Russell Island Croup, B. 1. 27 Feb 45; and sailed therefrom on 28 Feb 45; arr at Banika, Lass Island Group, B.S.I., on 1 Mar 45; and sailed therefrom on 15 Mar 45; arr at Ulithi, Caroline Islands on 21 Mar 45; sailed therefrom on Mar 45; arr and disembarked at Okinawa Shima, Ryukyu Islands on 1 Acr 45. Participated in operations with the First Marine Division against enemy (Japanese) forces at Okinawa Shima, Ryukyu Islands.

from 1Apr45 to MAY 7 1945 45.

JARVIS M. PETERSEN 1st LT., USMCR. Personnel Officer.

NAME		RANK	CLASS	IDENT. NO	
Flanigan, B	artholomew Aloysious	PFC	USMCR	967	
ORGANIZATION		TYPE OF CASUALTY	AREA	DATE OF	
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- **Evac to USNH Hawaiian area or Continent USA 30May45. USFH#115, Rep#124, 31May45 9Jun45. (cr)
- ** Evac to mainland aboard USS BOLIVAR 10June45. USS BOLIVAR, rep dtd 10June45, rec'd 16June45. (hs)
 - ** Trans 17Jun45 to USNH, Seattle, WN., fr Form F card fr USS BOLIVAR rec'd 16Jul45.(rp)

*Date of WIA taken fr Hq lstMarDiv CasRep#20-45 11Jul45 20Jul45also states FSW Back and arms. (jb) NH22/FH-115 P15-P

> U. S. FLEET HOSPITAL #115 c/o FLEET POST OFFICE SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

From: To: Medical Officer in Command.

Pfc Bartholomew (n) FLANIGAN, 967378, USMCR

Subject:

Purple Heart -- Award of .

Enclosure:

(A) Purple Heart Medal.

1. In the name of the President of the United States, and by direction of the Secretary of the Navy, the Purple Heart is awarded by the Commanding Officer, U. S. Fleet Hospital #115 to:

Bartholomew (n) FLANIGAN Private First Glass U. S. Marine Corps

for wounds received in action against an enemy of the United States on 6 May 1945.

J.N.C. GORDON

Copy to:

Comdt. USMC ComdenFMF Pac FILE ON CASE