

May 22, 2003

The enclosed short history of my life, as I remember it 50-60 years ago, to some, it might be of little interest and boring to read. There are some mistakes in it but nothing of importance. Since all letters were censored during that period of time, just consider the foregoing as a series of letters to folks back home.

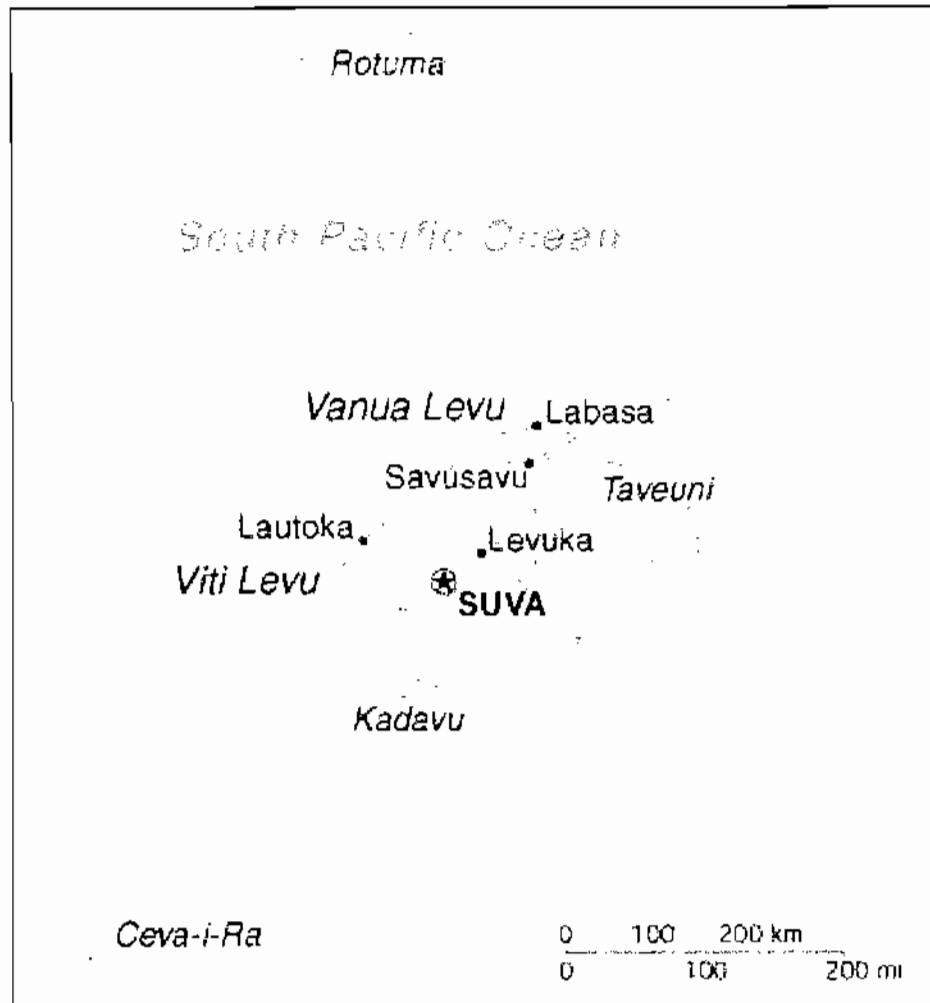
Back in 1998, when I first started putting together this story, I made many notes many of which I discarded. When I had decided what I was going to do, I brought out my old Underwood typewriter and started typing on my bench in the garage, standing up. Many years had passed since I had used a typewriter on a regular basis. I made many mistakes. When I had finished with the "story", my daughter Pam Winter told me that she would retype it and make necessary corrections. Which she did with the help of her husband Jack. This help was greatly appreciated.

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"A DOG FACE
UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS"



By

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August 1998

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Prologue

The following events occurred to me are true and accurate to the best of my memory. During the time period of 1941-1945, America was in the middle of World War II. To ensure protection of America and her people, it was extremely important that

Secrecy and censorship were of the highest priority. All overseas mail was censored. In all of my letters that I sent home, I was forbidden to write about these events concerning war. This short time of my life that I endured during wartimes was unknown to anyone, until after the war. I discussed it at times with times with my 1st wife, Bonnie June. It was not until 1998, with the encouragement of Charlie Ruth, my present wife, and my daughters, Pat and Pam that I started to remember those events and wrote them down on paper. If I remember correctly, the officer that censored the mail was Lt. Chesser. The foregoing events would not be allowed.

It is to my dismay that I didn't record these war memories when they were still so fresh in my head 50 years ago. Then my mother and brothers and sister could have read them. They were the ones that corresponded with me while I was overseas.

The following words are very clear to me in my memory as to their meaning and significance in my life as a soldier in war. I will gladly explain their meaning to you and you will have a better comprehension of their importance to me in my life and why I felt compelled to write this book to you, the public.

The word "Dogface" means "enlisted man in the armed forces. Also the phrase, "Under the Southern Cross", has this explanation. This means "a cluster of stars in the Heavens that can be seen only in the skies South of the Equator.

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Silence was the word as the giant ship eased out into the bay. Visibility was limited because it was barely daylight and there was a heavy fog laying over the Water. The smoking lamp was lit and the men were staring in the gloom trying to see the Statue Of Liberty as the ship cleared the New York harbor. Within a Few hours we would be at sea on the Atlantic Ocean. It was early March 1942 and the beginning of a very long ocean voyage. It was early wartime and everyone could feel the tension in the air. There were no available warships to Escort us South. Ruinors were flying thick and fast about the Nazi subs, but We did not see any.

I was a soldier and my outfit was a field artillery unit. We had received our Training at Fort Bragg, N.C. My unit consisted of about 100 men and officers.

During the day, we were kept active with exercises, boat drills and all types of classes. We were required to wear out lifejackets at all times, even at night. Because of the likelihood of being attacked and sunk by a sub. We were served two meals a day because of the many men on board ship. Several thousand, at least. The name of the ship was the "USS Uruguay." It was about 30,000 tons and had been a cruise ship at one time. It had been converted for wartime use. "Battery A", my outfit, was quartered on D

deck. D deck was located 4 decks down on the ship. The men slept on bunks that were stacked 3 bunks high.

Sleeping below decks was nice and warm but the closer we came to Florida, the hotter it became. So, the men started sleeping on deck where it was cooler. Somewhere down the coast, an army blimp escorted us. When we weren't in classes or exercising, we would be reading books or writing letters back home.

We arrived in the Panama Canal in about 10 to 15 days. This was my first trip to the tropics and I thought it was very beautiful. My eyes just drank up all the beauty that they were beholding. We were in the Panama Canal for just a day or two, taking on supplies and fresh water. Traveling through the locks in the Canal was really quite an experience. Soon, we were out in the Pacific Ocean. We were soon out of the sight of any land at all and an extremely long voyage ahead of us.

I failed to mention that all the time that the ship was sailing south, it was all done on a zigzag course, making the ship a difficult target for enemy subs. This evasive action continued throughout the voyage. The days were long and hot. The men wore as little clothing as possible because of the sweltering heat.

We picked up a destroyer and sub chaser a few days out from the Canal. We saw them drop a few dept charges several times but we never saw the results. We did see many flying fishes and dolphins. They were a lot of fun to watch from the side of the ship.

One day, the men had turkey for lunch. Unfortunately, the meat was tainted. Almost everyone on board was sick and the latrines were quite a mess. I mean a

“Real mess.”

Crossing the Pacific was a long and boring trip. Fresh water was for drinking and cooking only. We had saltwater showers and no soap would lather in that water. The men took many showers just to cool off and there was no deodorant of any kind on board ship. We washed our clothes or rinsed them in saltwater in large tubs. We were at liberty to roam about the ship as we pleased. Now, there was much idle time. Playing cards, reading books, or writing letters was our pastimes.

Every morning, our sergeant had a roll call of the men. Every man had to answer roll call. One morning, one of the men in my battery did not answer the call. A thorough search was done on ship but the man was never found. It was assumed that he fell overboard during the night. There was a sick bay on the ship and when became ill, there was a doctor on call. One day, one of the men died while he was in sickbay, and the Chaplain had services for him and he was buried at sea.

The food was fair considering the amount of men on board ship. All of the mess tables were waist high and eating was done standing up. The edges of the tables had raised edges so that the food would not slip off the tables in high seas. We had many boiled eggs to eat. It seemed as though the mess hall wanted to get rid of them.

The weather was not always good. At times, we would run into a tropical storm and the ship would toss and turn and shake and groan. Below deck, you could almost hear the ship moan and groan. In a storm, all the doors (hatches) were secured and no one was allowed on deck, excluding the ships crew.

After many days at sea, we finally pulled into this very beautiful island for fresh supplies of water. The name of the island is “Bora Bora”. I have read that this island is

one of the most beautiful in the world. The water is extremely clear in the channel. As our ship eased into the channel, natives in small boats came alongside of the ship.

They let us know that they were to dive into the water for money thrown to them by the soldiers on board ship. They did and sometimes, they would find the money. We could see some soldiers and jeeps on the island, but we did not get off the ship. Except to take a swim in the beautiful and cool water. We were not allowed to swim in the water without a partner because the water was very deep and we did not want any accidents to happen.

We left "Bora Bora" and headed back out to sea. As we entered the Tasman Sea, the weather turned "very, very, bad." The seas were very high and violent. All hatches were battered down and no one was allowed on deck. The storm did not last very long and we were once again in calm waters.

We were only at Bora Bora after a few days because the only reason we stopped there was to take on fresh water and more supplies.

I failed to mention that when we left Bora Bora, our next stop would be to New Zealand. I "believe" that the trip only took us about 5-6 days. We pulled into Auckland harbor on Easter Sunday 1942. We saw many boats in the harbor and many people on the ferryboats. They were very friendly and they did a lot of waving to us. Our stop there was only for water and other supplies. We did not get off the ship and were back out to sea in a day or so.

Auckland was a pretty town, what we could see from the ship. We were not tourists and could not get off the ship when we wanted. The New Zealanders had a very important role in the war effort.

As I mentioned before, a destroyer or sub chaser were with us all the way across the Pacific Ocean. Sometimes, in rough seas, the sub chaser would be in plain view. Then, all of a sudden, the ship disappeared. Then, he would be back in view. It almost appeared that the ship had sunk.

When we would be lying in a harbor at night, it was very interesting to watch the various warships that would communicate with each other. It was always done with the semi fore lights. Some of the men operating the lights were extremely fast with the blinking lights. The obvious reasons being that using a radio was too dangerous.

The ship entered the Melbourne, Australia harbor and the city was very pretty. The men were allowed to visit the city with a 6-hour pass. We were required to be back on board ship before the 6-hour layover was over. Because of wartime, the city was in a brownout at night. The storefronts and windows of houses had to be covered so that no light could come through. All cars were required to have dimmers on the lights.

The city of Melbourne was so different, in a foreign way. We were just having a wonderful time. The people were very friendly and the girls were very pretty. There was a fair or carnival going on in the city at that time. Ralph and Herman picked two girls in the city and we went to the fair and had a ball. One of the girls invited us to her home and we were served tea and cookies. We met her parents and enjoyed our visit with them. We went to the Melbourne zoo and saw kangaroos and koala bears and other animals native to Australia. The zoo did not cost us anything because we were American soldiers. We also rode on the double-Decker buses and always rode on the upper decks so we could see the city sights better.

We were in the city only about a week or ten days. All of our equipment and supplies were being reloaded into a smaller ship because where we were going, only a small ship could enter the harbor of the city. Were we told where we were going? Of course not.

We finally boarded a smaller ship of about 9000 tons and cast off for parts unknown. This voyage only took about a week or 10 days. New Caledonia was a French possession and a very important island for the Allies. It lies east from Australia and the people were a few French but mostly dark skinned natives. We left the ship and marched thru the small town, Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia. A few of the shops were open but most of them were boarded up. There was really nothing to see in that town and so we did not tarry long. We marched to the outskirts and rested. Our trucks soon arrived and picked us up. We were carried only a short distance from the city because of our mission, at that time, was to guard the Noumea Bay against enemy attack. An enemy scout plane was observed in the area and we were immediately placed on red alert. The men started arming themselves with 30-caliber ammunition. All that we had at that time were old Springfield rifles. I really loaded myself down with ammo.

Our big field artillery guns, 105 howitzers, had not arrived on the island, so we had to make do. We laid out on the ground short pieces of logs so that, from the air, they would look like field artillery guns. Anything to fool the enemy. From a hill, they did look like guns. Our guns eventually arrived and we immediately went into training without end. Things that we already knew but we were striving for perfection. The weather at times was terrible but that did not stop the training. Rain and more rain.

I don't believe that I mentioned that the mosquitoes were also bad in New Caledonia. There were swarms and swarms of the pesky little bugs. In one area that we were camped in, they were so bad that we had to wear head nets. Our tents at that time were 6 man pyramidal tents but they could accommodate as many as 10 men. Each man was issued a mosquito bar that completely covered the bed at night. They really did keep out the pesky bugs. If some of the bugs were able to into the net at night, we were issued a bug bomb that took care of them. If I remember correctly, my outfit, the 245th field artillery Bn. Battery a, was on the island or about 8 or 9 months.

Sometimes, the Salvation Army or USO showed a movie, outdoors, of course. Come rain or shine, the movie went on. If it was raining, we just put on our raincoats or ponchos and helmets and sat on logs or on the ground and watched the movie.

As a private, I was subject to be on guard duty, KP, ammunition detail or water detail. This only happened to me only about once a month. It was an invaluable experience for me because it taught me how to goof off. There were about 70 men in my outfit that were required to do these tasks.

New Caledonia was an island with beauty without end. It was a French possession and all the natives spoke French. The natives were extremely dark-skinned and friendly. Many of these natives were used for maintaining the roads. One of the men in my outfit was from New Orleans and could speak French fluently. My commanding officer used this man to talk to the local people to buy supplies. Sometimes, we would have fresh vegetables on the menu.

Accidents were common among the men. One of the men, A. Hill, broke his arm jumping off the back of a truck. Another man, in a night training maneuver, fell into a ditch and broke his arm, while he was running fast in unfamiliar territory. Another man had his ankle broken while riding in the back of a truck because he had his leg hanging over the side when the truck sideswiped a tree. There were many minor injuries, but we had a medic (pill roller) that taped up our minor cuts and bruises. We had many infections on our bodies because of the extreme heat and jungle conditions. Our pill roller was a Yankee but I liked him anyway.

Mail call was a big event in our lives. Everybody looked forward to the arrival of mail from home. Each letter was read and reread many times. All of the men received letters and wrote them. The only exception was one of our commanding officers by the name of Sgt. Falcon. We were told that he did not write any letters and didn't receive any letters from home. He was well liked and knew his men. At that time, I was writing to two girls, one in Florida and one in North Carolina. Each letter contained about the same information and a lot of honey words. Sometimes, at night, some of my buddies and I would get together and sing to the moon. We were pretty good, especially me, and we had a lot of great laughs.

We were on this island for one purpose only. We were there to train and learn as much as possible about our big guns and the handling of them under all conditions. Also, we were just waiting for orders to be shipped out. To where, we had no clue. Guadalcanal was only mentioned a few times but nothing was definite.

Some of the training that we received in New Caledonia would not have been heard of in Fort Bragg. It would not have been allowed. For instance, we came up to a

small stream of water and I guess that it was a challenge to the officers. So, the dogfaces (enlisted men) were ordered to cut down some trees and make a raft. These logs were roped together to make a raft. It was the intention of putting one of the big guns on the raft and it was discovered very shortly that the idea was foolish from the start.

Another time, the trucks pulled the guns into a swamp. The gun was unhooked from the truck and the truck was driven out. The gun was in mud almost up to the rims. We were told to get the gun out of the swamp by hand by braking each wheel, one at a time and using leverage with the tongue of the trailer, and after much grunting and falling down in the mud, we were finally able to get the gun out of the swamp. To the average person, this might have seemed to be foolhardy but there was a good reason for all of this. We used the winch on the front of the trucks many times later and it was a very practical thing to have on a military vehicle. Even some of the jeeps had a winch. But, winches were not used for getting the guns out of that swamp.

We had broke camp and were to move further north on the island. Shortly before dark, it started to rain. A rainstorm ! We stopped after dark to pitch our tents and unload the trucks. Each man had a shelter half and when the two were put together, it made a two-man tent. The trucks were unloaded while it was still raining. After we loaded the trucks, Ralph and I put together our tent. We crawled in our tent, took off our wet raincoats, placed the wet side of the raincoat on the soggy ground and lied down for the night. Did we get any sleep at all that night? Of course not.

These may sound like tales of fiction to someone, but they actually happened to me. To the best of my knowledge. Over 50 years of time, there were many things that happened, that I do not even remember.

New Caledonia

Flashlights were a necessity for everyone. The supply room had an endless supply of batteries for all the men. Since we were in training night or day, it was imperative that we had ample light at night to see by. We were required to tape up the lenses of the flashlights so that only a small sliver of light could be seen from the flashlights. The light seen was about the size of a pencil eraser. Even the truck lights were covered over so that only a small beam of light would show on the ground ahead. Of course, this was just in training but it was a necessary thing to be learned. With these types of lights, we had to put the guns in position, prepare the guns for accuracy and load the guns and then fire them. All of this training was very beneficial to all the men because we used it, later, with no end.

One day, we were driven to a creek that had deep water in it at one end. Some of the men had built a platform over the deep end of the pond. The men were lined up, with a knapsack on his back and each man was supposed to climb up the platform (which was about 15 feet high) and jump off into the water. There was always plenty of help in or out of the water if a man had any kind of trouble. Of course, we knew why we were being put to this kind of test.

I was to prepare us for later if our ship was sunk by enemy fire. I jumped off the platform and into the water, no problem. Some of the men hesitated but finally jumped.

As I have already mentioned early on, our guns were 105 caliber for a howitzer gun. This gun was primarily for firing short distances, usually with a very high arch.

Later on, there were many times that we would fire our guns very close to the front lines. On one of our training days, the men put one of the guns in position and made it ready for firing. The gun was to be fired into the side of a hill. This was direct firing. This was a new technique, direct firing. We were also instructed on firing at a moving target, but this was not tried because much training was associated with this and we did not need it. Many things were tried but never used.

In later October 1942, our commanding officer told us that he had been issued orders for our division to disembark shortly for Guadalcanal. We knew that this island was held by the Japanese, but the U.S. Marines were in a fierce battle to take the island. They were holding beachheads and it would be our job to go in and relieve them. The First Marine Battalion was the outfit that we were to relieve.

Before I forget, my division was formed on New Caledonia. My division did not have a number, instead, it had a name. The men were asked to suggest a name for the division and one came up with the name "Americal." American troops in New Caledonia, thus, the name, "Americal." Our shoulder patch on our uniforms had a blue shield with stars of the Southern Cross. These stars in the sky can only be seen in the sky south of the equator. Therefore, I was a "dogface"(an enlisted man) under the Southern Cross. One day my mess sergeant, Sgt. Ball, had a long talk with me. At that time (on New Caledonia), the Army was having a cooking and baking school near Noumea. Ball wanted me to go and told me that in just a short time, I would get a rating (Sgt.). But, by

doing so, I would have to leave my outfit and my friends. I would be reassigned, possibly, and I did not want that. So I remained a private and cannoneer on a 105 gun.

Our ship had arrived. It was a 9,000-ton liberty ship and I rode on several of them while overseas. We were packed and ready to go. Some Lst's came off the ship (LST's were small ships that could carry as many as 100 men. When the LST got near the shore, the front of the ship dropped down so that the men could run into it). We were loaded and were soon on the Liberty ship. There was very little talk going on at this count.

If I remember correctly, we had a destroyer escort us up to Guadalcanal

The security was extremely tight on board ship. At night, no one was allowed on deck, except the ships personnel. During the day, we had some kind of class or extensive exercises. The men were in excellent physical condition. Everything was explained to us in detail, where we were going, the climate, the terrain, what the marines had done, the strength of the enemy (as they knew it). We also knew that we would have to go over the side of the ship using the same rope ladders that we used to board the ship. Each man had a backpack on his back; a rifle slung over his neck, and a steel helmet on his head and still couldn't fall because if we fell it would be into the LST or the water. These classes were all well received and all the men listened very closely. We spent a lot of leisure time cleaning our rifles and other equipment.

As it was on all of the ships that I had been on, the rule of the day and night was to always wear your life preserver. If a man was caught without his life preserver on, he received a tongue-lashing and it was well deserved.

This ship that I was on, did not carry the whole division. As a matter of fact, it only had Battery A B and C. A total of 12-105 gnns. Each gun had about eight men assigned to it to man it. But each battery had an ammunition section, a wire section, kitchen crew and other related sections manned by many men. My batteries of men were all good men and we were a close-knit group of men. Which is as it should be.

4
November 9, 1912 Guadalcanal

It was not daylight but we could make out the trees on the island. We had orders to go over the side using the nets attached to the side of the ship. Small landing boats would be waiting for us at the bottom of the nets.

I had a dull feeling in my stomach and I guess that you would say that I was afraid. I was and so was everyone else on board ship. But, I did not have time for that. We were lined up with all of our gear and waiting for the go signal.

At daylight, the signal was given and over the sides we went. With a steel helmet on my head and a rifle slung across my neck, I had to go down that ladder as quickly as possible. Once the boat was loaded we cast off and the man in charge of the boat steered it toward the shore. As soon as the boat touched the bottom, the front of the boat dropped down and the men started moving out of the boat and on up the beach. We had not been on the beach for just a short period of time when we were attacked upon by Zero planes. None of my group was hit but I found out quickly the importance of a "fox hole." I also noticed that I was saying the 23rd psalm. We moved inland very quickly out and away from the beaches. Our big guns were arriving and they had to be put into position. Our primary goal, at that time as to guard and protect the only airfield, Henderson field, on the island. The marines had taken control of this airfield from the Japanese. The Battery

A division immediately put our guns into position guarding the airfields. There was much to do and so little time to do it in. The guns had to be dug in, ammunition for the guns had to be ~~filled with sand~~ ^{MADE READY}, the trucks had to be unloaded and camouflaged as well as the guns. The latrines also had to be dug.

All these duties had to be done in the sweltering heat and also fighting off swarms of mosquitoes. We were no longer in training. This was the "real thing." As soon as our guns were in position and leveled, we received a "fire" command from the front lines. At the time, we had plenty of 105 ammo. My battery A division consisted of four guns. Each gun had about 6-8 men assigned to each gun. My battery had ammunition handlers, a wire section consisting of 6-8 men, and a kitchen section consisting of 1st and 2nd cooks and assistants.

I was assigned to the 3rd section, a section that was the 3rd gun. We would get an order for the #1 gun to fire a few rounds and after a few corrections the order would come down to fire all four guns, sometimes, the order would be for the high explosive or a timed shell that was timed so that it would explode in the mid air, or a smoke shell which when it landed, it exploded and sent up a lot of smoke. It was my job to provide the correct shell to the #2 man. He would then put the shell into the breach of the gun. The #1 man would level the gun and fire. The gunner adjusted the gun from left to right according to instructions from the firing officer. Sometimes, we would get an order to fire and keep firing until we were told to cease firing. This would keep the men on the guns busy, busy, and busy! The orders that we received came from the front lines and from our wire section that worked closely with the marines. Of course, being on the front lines, they were exposed to the many dangers that the marines were also faced with.

We were called upon to fire the guns night or day, mosquitoes, or no mosquitoes, rain or shine. We were near our guns “forever” and we even dug foxholes next to the guns and rigged up a pup tent over the holes and slept in the holes.

Each day, as we went thru the chow line for our grub, the health officer saw to it that each man would receive an Atabrine table. This table was supposed to prevent malaria fever. This was one of his duties. It was also his responsibility to see to the health of the men. A clean kitchen and good food. But, as it turned out to be, the atabrine pills did the men little good, as was discovered later on.

Maybe a week had passed when a Japanese naval fleet entered Iron Bottom bay. It had been named that because so many ships, U.S. and Japanese had been sunk in the bay. One of the Japanese ships that entered the bay, at night, was a Japanese battleship. My outfit was in a position very close to Henderson airfield. The battleship started shelling the airfield and we could hear the shells passing overhead. The shells were very large and heavy and made a terrifying sound going through the sky.

One night, we watched a naval battle and we saw many of the big naval guns in action. Some of the ships were hit and exploded. The Japanese were eager to keep this island in their command because it was their main island for attacking the Allied fleet. They were forever more sending down thru “the slot” more ships loaded with troops. Many of those ships were sunk, and of course, we had ships sunk as well.

That big naval battle that we witnessed that night, we were told later on, that one of the American ships that were sunk was a destroyer with 3 or 4 brothers on board. I do not remember how many of the brothers died on that ship. I was told that were the

Sullivan brothers. Shortly after that tragedy happened, the navy stopped letting brothers serve on the same ship.

There was one time on the island, that we had low food rations. They were so low, that we were only allowed, 1 meal a day. We had powdered eggs, powdered potatoes and Spam. Powdered this and powdered that! Sometimes, we had mutton and goat meat, from Australia.

One of my friends, Simon North, went into the Army the same day that I did. That day was on April 9 of 1941. We went through all the training together and stayed together until Guadalcanal. Simon was a truck driver; his truck was assigned to pull one of the 105 guns. He was a good friend to me all the way through. One day, during mess call, we were eating our chow; cows tongue was on the menu for that day. All of a sudden, and without warning, we were under artillery attack. Simon was eating and some of the shrapnel hit him in his legs. He was immediately carried to first aid. Shortly thereafter, he was evacuated to New Hebrides Island. I did not see Simon anymore until later. To get ahead of myself a little, the next time I saw Simon was at Camp Shelby, Miss. I heard someone call out "Hick." It was Simon. It's a small world! Simon died from emphysema a few years ago.

As I mentioned earlier, the mosquitoes on the island were a very serious problem. And since these were malaria mosquitoes, we were supposed to be taking all precautions to prevent malaria fever. We were provided with nets to go over our faces and our cots at night. We were also given Atabrine tablets on a daily basis. Being a private and a cannoneer, I also continued to have guard duty and duty in the kitchen. On one particular day, I was assigned to help in the kitchen. It was hot and dirty work and it was from

daylight to dark hours. When I went back to my tent, after K.P. duty, I was determined to have a shower. It was just at dusk and I had a look around to see if I could spot the health officer. I saw no suspicious officers so I proceeded to take a shower with our improvised shower, I was almost through showering when I heard a man say, "Don't you know it is against the rules to be taking a shower after dusk?" It was the health officer. I told him my name rank and serial no. This little episode for trying to be clean cost me three days of laying barbwire around the camp. War is "Hell!"

During my time overseas, I learned how to write letters. If any letters were written, they were written during our spare time. What was that? Spare time? It wasn't very often! Of course, I was writing to two different girls at the same time and telling them about the same things. I also wrote to my sister and sister-in-laws. At that time, we were all sending our letters by V mail*. A PO 716 mail division would take pictures of the letters and make miniatures of them, saving much needed space on the ships. Once in a while, my mother would send me some cookies or something sweet. But by the time it arrived, after being in a ships hold for several weeks, I had throw away the package due to spoilage. We had several boys from Ybor City, Tampa, Fla., in my battery. Once in a while, they would receive a package from home. The package they received would contain salami or other meats that didn't need any refrigeration. Of course, they always shared it with their friends. All in all, my battery had many fine and honorable men in it. Me included. Sure.

One night, we received an order from the front lines for an all night barrage. We had the shells and so we went after them. My battery fired off and on nearly all night. The next morning, the order came to break camp and move forward. After the guns were

hooked up to the trucks and everything was loaded, we started moving out. Just a few miles up the road, we saw what the marines and our big guns had done the previous night. Dead Japanese men were lying everywhere. There were many dead men. Our truck drivers could not stop and we were in too big of a hurry to catch up with the japs. In order to keep from hitting or driving over the dead men, our drivers had to weave in and around the dead bodies. Another mile or two, we set up camp again. We were told later that so many Japanese had been killed that a bulldozer was used to help bury the men. Because the supplies were so low in the enemy camps and they were not able to receive any more supplies by sea, the Japanese soldiers were very thin and emaciated.

It wasn't long after we had set up our guns in the new positions, that three Japanese bombers flew over the camp at tree top level. They were so low that I saw the three men in the plane. They came in the area so unexpectedly, that no one in the camp was able to fire on the planes. However, we heard later that all three planes were shot down.

At this particular camp, we were able to roam around a little on foot. We examined several Japanese anti-aircraft guns that had been abandoned. Then we found several Japanese bicycles had skinny wheels and were very lightweight. I got on one and rode it for only a short time because the roads were bad.

We were camped near the beach and at this particular beach there was coral everywhere. We decided to go in swimming. (Bare bottom) Since there were no girls (American) on the island, we let it all hang out.

We could look out across the water to Sevo Island and Florida Island. Some of the most famous naval battles of World War II were fought in this channel. Many

American and Japanese soldiers lost their lives here. One day we were walking on the island and we came across several drowned enemy soldiers. These men were later buried.

The supply sergeant had a radio of sorts. Every night (when we could) we listened to a radio station from Tokyo that was beamed to the island in the South Pacific. Sometimes, they would play records of some of our American songs. They did this with the idea that it would make us lonely and want to go home. An American woman, who had adopted Japan as her home, called herself "Tokyo Rose." She did her best to make us homesick and feeling blue. She also told us news about our fleet movements that she was not supposed to know. We got many laughs about Tokyo Rose.

Nearly every night, while we were on the island, a Japanese plane would fly across the island. We believed that this was mostly for harassment and to keep us awake. The sirens would go off and the searchlights would play on the skies and try to zero in on the lone plane. Of course, the anti-aircraft batteries would open up on him and fire many rounds at him. If he was ever, I do not know it. The nickname that we gave this lone Japanese plane was "Sewing Machine Charlie." Because of the weird sound that the plane made going over.

FIJI ISLANDS

The Japanese were finally defeated in Feb. 1943 on the island of Guadalcanal. Battery A was to be relieved of duties on the island. Our replacements began to arrive and preparations began for us to leave the island. We boarded a liberty ship and began the voyage to Fiji Islands. The voyage was only about 7-10 days.

Fiji was a tropical paradise. It had all the beautiful scenery that one could imagine. It was a British position and all the natives and all the people were friendly. The Fiji Islands lie South of the Solomon Islands. The climate was delightful.

But, we were not there to enjoy the scenery or the natives. We were there to rest and regroup and for more intensive training. More training such as that we were subjected to on New Caledonia. For a short period of time, we were quartered in huts made by natives. They were large enough to accommodate 15 or 20 men. Our position at that time was only about 10 miles from the capitol, Suva.

As I mentioned before, we were exposed to the malaria mosquito on Guadalcanal. Here, on Fiji, the fever started taking its toll. Before my unit left the island, some 8-9 months later, 90% of the men had been in the hospital for the fever. If I remember correctly, it took about a week stay in the hospital before a man was returned to his outfit for duty. I was in the hospital myself twice while on the island. I also was in the hospital once while on Bouganville for malaria fever.

The men were given passes to go to town, and did we enjoy those trips! There were the natives, extremely black people, the British people and Indians (from India).

We walked the streets and smiled at the girls and took in a movie and played some baseball in a park in Suva.

When my outfit moved to the upper end of the island, we started training once again. Sometimes it was almost without end, night and day. We had to perfect our skills to the utmost because we were to go back into battle.

While overseas, the men could buy at the PX (post exchange) cigarettes for 50 cents a pack. I believe that many of the men were addicted to tobacco for this reason.

Beer was also available at a reduced price. Also coke beverages. Sometimes, when a man was smoking a cig on guard duty at night in combat zone, he would have to duck under a raincoat to light the thing so the enemy would not see the light.

While on the island, I made a ring for myself out of an Aussie florin for 50 cents. It fit me then and it still fits me now. 1998,

One day, one of the young Fiji boys, about 10 or 12 years old came into the camp with a stalk of beautiful bananas. One of our buddies immediately bought the bananas for about a dollar and he shared this delicious fruit with all of his buddies. I watched some of the native women washing the clothing in the streams. They would soak the uniforms with water and soap and then take a rock or stick and beat the dirt out of the clothes.

When we first journeyed to the end of the island, the trucks were stopped and our c.o. had a little talk with us about what we might see as we rode through the native villages. At that time, the dress of the native women was for comfort and necessity. They wore nothing above the waist. We (including myself) did a lot of looking and sighing. But that was the extent of it.

There was one paved road that completely circled the island. It hugged the coast all the way around. But, we stayed in the interior at all times in training. Except the brief time that we were just a few miles in camp from Suva. The name of this highway was Queen Victoria Highway.

Some of us boys played baseball in the one big playground in Suva. After the game, we walked downtown and attended a movie. We bought roasted peanuts and ate them while we watched the movie.

We would walk around the town and make eyes at the pretty girls but they were usually dark-skinned and seemed to be afraid of the soldiers. I struck out again! The local police were tall muscular Fijian men and they wore a distinctive skirt almost to their ankles with pleats across the bottom. At one time, I had pictures of these policemen.

While we were in Fiji, (after Guadalcanal) one of my buddies started acting very strange. He was very mixed up and irrational about everything that he did. The pill roller was notified and the man was put under observation. He was put under medication and ended up in the hospital. After a short period of time, he was on a ship back to the states. I will not mention his name but he was from Ybor City, Florida. We had other men in the battery from Ybor City and he wrote to one of them later and told them that he had completely recovered and had gone to work for the Post Office.

The Motor Pool Sergeant was Sgt. Ramsey. One night he borrowed one of the jeeps and went to town and had a night out with a native girl. On the way back to camp, he wrecked his jeep and was up before the C.O. for a tongue-lashing. I believe that he had to pay for the damage done to the jeep.

When we were in Fiji, our c.o. arranged with the local Fiji singers and dancers to entertain the troops. Every one was seated around a large bonfire and the natives put on a very entertaining show for us. They danced and sang the Fiji song. I had a copy of this song long ago. This entertainment was warmly received by all of the dogfaces.

The local wine on Fiji was made from the taro (potato) plant. Some of the boys bought some of this "stuff" but I wasn't interested in it. When we were in training in Fiji, it was training without end, but we did have a few breaks. We would play casino or solitaire or pinochle by candlelight far into the night.

The climate in Fiji was pleasant and was not unbearably hot. Therefore, we wore full uniforms. As I mentioned before, we had to do our own laundry. Until Fiji, natives were always available and eager to do our laundry, for a few Fiji pence or shillings. Ralph and I went over to one of the village and saw the huts that the people lived in. They were small, one large room with thick mats on the dirt floors. The whole family would eat and sleep in this one room.

Dec. 1943

BOUGAINVILLE

We arrived from the Fiji Island by another liberty ship. We had to go over the side of the ship with rope ladders, as we did before, into LSTS. The first day was not as terrifying as our first day on Guadalcanal. I do remember that the Japs were heavily fortified and in great numbers on the island. Our objective was, as it was on the island, to reinforce the infantry. Many times we would see the soldiers marching past us on our way the front. Many of the man would yell at us and ask for a ride. God knows that war is "hell on earth."

Men in our battery that were attached to the wire section, they were the ones that went to the front lines with the soldiers. They were the eyes and the ears of the field artillery. They would call back to the battery on telephones that they had laid the wire. They would tell us what kind of shell, how many, how far and what the timing must be put on the shell. Their job was a very dangerous job but a very necessary one. One of the men in the wire section, his name was Poppell, was not a very likeable person but one that I tolerated. I did not see him very often because he was on the front lines with the

wire section. One day, he was in a foxhole on the front lines, when a Japanese knee mortar shell fell by him and he was instantly killed.

The men in the wire section carried their telephones and equipment on their backs and they would lay wire from a truck as they run along behind the truck. Sometimes, the battery that powered the telephone was weak and the signals were not very clear when they spoke on the phone.

Digging foxholes were a way of life. In fact, they were life, at times. Sometimes, Harbert and I would dig a foxhole big enough for two. If we were to remain in one area for an extended time, we would try to find some logs to cover the hole so that we might a little more protection. In one location, one of our sergeants decided to dig a foxhole under the exposed roots of a tree. He finished digging it and lay down in it to sleep one night. As it was, he was stung numerous times by a centipede before he could get out of the hole.

The infantry used flamethrower many times on the enemy when they would not come out of their foxholes. It was a terrible weapon and many men were killed this way. Of course, the infantry had their small arms rifles and machine guns as well as the flamethrowers. Sometimes, on certain occasions, an American Corsair plane would strike the enemy.

One of the hills on the island, they call Hill 260 was taken time and time again by the GI's, only to lose it the next day to the Japanese. It was a terrible battle zone. My battery sent many 105s on that hill. After the GIs had finally secured the hill, some of us men went up on that hill to see the damage. The trees and vegetation was still smoking. It honestly looked like a place from hell! It was eerie. Many men died on that hill.

BOUGAINVILLE

I must tell you this while it is fresh in my mind. We fired many rounds of 105 ammunition at the Japanese while on this island. And of course, as usual, we always had much unused gunpowder left over. When washing our clothes, we would use this gun powder(burning one or two grains at a time) to heat the water in the 5 gallon pots. We all had dirty clothes to wash at one time or another, and we all used this unused gunpowder for this purpose.

Well, I was washing my clothes one day, using this very fast and effective way of boiling water, when lo and behold, the fire started to spread away from the pot and everyone, I mean everyone, got into the act to put out the fire. A few snide remarks were made to me but it could have happened to anyone.

The gunpowder pellets were about the size of a small marble with a hole down the center.

I believe that I have mentioned before about a woman called "Tokyo Rose." We heard her on the radio while we were on Guadalcanal and now that we were on Bougainville, she was trying to make us homesick again with her playing some of our favorite American songs on Japanese radio. On this island, it seemed that the searchlights were more powerful and bright and were able to spot the Japanese planes at night quicker. Of course, every time that an enemy plane was spotted, the air raid sirens would go off and would continue until the all clear was given.

While in one position, a few miles across the way, we could see hills and pockmarked in these hills were Jap mountain guns. A destroyer was lying out in the bay and this warship was brought into the action. This ship started firing its heavy guns into

that hillside, round after round. After a period of time, the warship left the scene and we saw no more action from that hill.

Fresh water was a must for all the men. This water usually came from a freighter out in the bay in 55 gal. Drums. Someone had to handle those drums and it was usually privates. There always was material of some kind to be unloaded from the ships. I was fortunate that I did not have this type of detail work to handle. We were always, always too busy with our own big guns.

I will mention a few of our superior officers. Capt. Howell, Capt. Berger and Lt. Schultz. I had no trouble with any of C O s. Capt. Howell is the one that gave me 3 days laying barbwire around the campsite for taking a shower after dusk. I played badminton with Capt. Berger. He was an okay guy.

While on Bougainville, we did have some idle time. During the day we would either read a book or write a letter home. At night, we would pull our cots together and with 2 Or 3 candles for light we would play pinochle till late at night. It would usually be Harbert, Register, Hospodar or Hill playing. Sometimes, we would play with 2 decks. There was no gambling going on between these men. Some of the men ambled quite heavily at payday time. Some of it was heavy betting, sometimes, with cards or sometimes with dice. I knew how to play all of the games, just by watching. But, I did not get into that habit. Sometimes, the men would get a beer ration, maybe a six-pack or so. I refused mine, at first. I got to like it after a period of time, but not for very long. Cigarettes were free or 5 cents a pack. I smoked just a few packs and decided they were not for me.

When we played cards, Hospodar always wore his Catholic prayer beads around his neck. Every man was required to wear his dog tags around his neck at all times.

If we were in a site for any length of time, some one would erect a frame for a shower. A 55-gallon drum would be put on top of the frame and filled with water. A showerhead would be placed on the bottom of the drum and that's how we were able to take a shower. And did the men ever enjoy that shower! Of course, privates had to fill that drum with water. Think about it.

Some of the roads were ^{not} paved so they were very dusty. Sometimes, if we were crossing a stream, we would get off the truck and give the truck and guns a good washing. If we were in a hurry, we would find a bar of GI soap and wash ourselves all over, with our uniforms on, if that is what they are called at that time, under those conditions. Can you imagine, a man taking a bath in a stream with his clothes on?

I do not know if I mentioned this before, but each battery had a mail clerk and a supply sergeant. The mail clerk assisted the supply man in his duties.

One of the skin diseases of the islands was one they called jungle rot. One day, an infection developed on my left ankle. I would not go away. The pill roller treated it to no avail. The itch started to spread up my leg. There was a medicine that was purple in color. It seemed that the medic used that for every kind of ailment. This jungle rot eventually caused me to be hospitalized. While I was treated for this disease in the hospital, one of the patients in the hospital shot off his big toe. I do not know the story behind this but I guess that he did not want to go back into action.

Seldom did we receive fresh meat or fresh milk. It was usually dried or frozen. One day, one of the men saw a school of fish near the shore. He told the mess sergeant

about it and he received permission from our commanding officer to throw out a few hand grenades out among the school of fish. OH, HAPPY DAY! We had a wonderful meal of fresh fish. But, it was quite a job cleaning those for the kitchen crew.

I must mention, if I have not already done so, something about these islands of Bougainville. If I remember correctly, the Solomon Islands are only about 7 degrees south of the equator. They are extremely hot and humid and rainsqualls are common. In some places, the ground is very muddy and slick. There are mosquitoes galore! The wrong kind!

I remember that on one of the islands, the Battalion had a chaplain, a preacher. One of the privates was assigned to aid him in his tasks around the campground. I do remember that the private made the chaplain an altar. I also remember that the chaplain held open services and I went to church with Simon North. I don't remember which island this took place on. I also attended church in Suva, Fiji, also. It was a Catholic church.

One of our privates was not too smart and I honestly do not know how he got into the service. He was an officer's assistant. He put up the tent for them, he dug their latrine, he dug their foxhole at mealtime, he waited on their table (the officers did not eat with the enlisted men) and he also washed their clothes. It was a necessary job and he did his job well. I am not in any way putting down this man for he was a good man.

I mentioned the rain before. If we received a fire command, rain or shine, the order had to be carried out. It was important to keep the shells and the powder dry and that is what we did.

There were times for rest and relaxation. While on this island, Special Services would set up a makeshift screen for movies. Of course, it was all outdoors. Once every few months, a feature film would be shown and every GI would turn out to see a movie. If it rained, we would just wear our raincoats and helmet and get just as wet as a frog. And, we still loved it. Bob Hope and his troupe performed one time. We also saw Jack Benny and company. There were always pretty girls with the actors and this made many men very excited. Of course, it also excited me.

There was a location on the other end of the island that was far away from the action. Sometimes, a small group of men would go there for a few days of R & R. Rest and Relaxation. This was done on a rotation basis. But, of course, just a few of the men got a chance to go. It was just for reading, writing, sleeping, and resting.

When we left Fiji, we brought some Fiji soldiers to act as scouts for the infantry. These men were exceptional in their scouting duties. They were accustomed to the tropical weather and were very adept at tracking and scouting of all kinds. They were also effective in their duties with the infantry.

I must mention this before I forget. During the initial landing and assault on this island, much was done and with great haste. At the end of the day, which was a long one, we were "dog tired."

Bougainville

You guessed it! It was my night for guard duty. Glenn Register also was on duty. There were many Japs in the area and we were cautioned to be on the alert. Glen and I sat facing each other about 40 feet away so that we cover the full circle with our eyes on the forest. I was completely worn out and it was to be for an all night watch. I

dozed off several times and Glenn saw what was happening. He became frightened about what might be coming up behind him. He could not move or call out. So, what did he do? Why, he started throwing small rocks at me and he finally woke me up. He gave me a tongue lashing the next morning, which I deserved.

We were continually moving our positions. We had moved into this new position and the guns had been dug in with camouflage nets over them. The ammunition had been dug in (as safely as possible) but the men had not dug their foxholes. The battery came under heavy artillery attack of mountain guns by the Japs. At the time, we had erected pyramidal tents for the men. One tent was big enough to sleep six men. As it was, one of the Jap shells exploded under my bed inside of the tent. The shell completely destroyed my bed, bedding materials, all of my belongings and the big tent. I was not in the bed but as busy trying to find a log to hide behind. That was my lucky day! We brought our guns to bear on the hills where the Jap guns were hidden and I do not know if we scored any hits. We did not hear anymore from those guns. Now you can understand the importance of digging your foxhole and to do it as quickly as possible.

There was a hospital on the island staffed by doctors and nurses. Occasionally, a doctor would come to the battery to check the health of the men. Malaria and skin diseases of all kinds were present. Toward the latter part of our occupation of this island, I developed a bad rash on my left ankle that refused to go away. I told the pill roller about it and he put some purple medicine on it. But, instead of improving the condition, it seemed to get worse. The doctor took a look at it and he told me that I had a case of jungle rot. The doctor treated it with calamine lotion. By this time, after a few weeks, it had spread up to my other leg. The doctor put me in the hospital. My legs up to my

knees were infected as well as my hands and arms up to my elbows. The aides treated me with boric acid soaks, calamine soaks and my hands and arms were wrapped in gauze.

Battery A had been on Bougainville for almost a year fighting the enemy. But, we had secured the island and were ready to leave for the Philippines.

Capt. Berger came by to see me in the hospital. I still had not recovered from a bad case of jungle rot. He told me that I had a choice. He could have me discharged from the hospital and I could go with my unit into battle in the Philippines. Or, I could take my chances and be discharged later. And maybe end up in the infantry. I told him to go ahead and have me discharged.

Philippine Islands

I was back with Battery A heading for the Philippines. We were on another Liberty ship, which was designed for troop transport. I still had not recovered from my case of jungle rot that I had acquired in Bougainville. I had high hopes that my hand would be well by the time that we arrived in the Philippines.

The sea voyage lasted only about a week. When we arrived at Tacloban, Leyte Bay, I have never seen so many ships in my life. It seemed that the bay was full of Allied ships. When it came time for us to disembark, the usual LST's came out and took us off the ship. When we neared shore, the front of the LST dropped down and we had to wade in. At this time, we were not facing any enemy action.

I was with my battery for about a week or 10 days, but my hands would not heal. I was put in the hospital. My buddies and friends, who had been with me through thick and thin, came to tell me goodbye. My outfit was moving on, and without me. I was not in Leyte very long before I was taken by plane to New Guinea. I was in the hospital in

Hollandia and then Lae, still being treated for jungle rot. En route from Leyte to New Guinea, by plane, we stopped for fuel at Peliau,

After a short period of time, I left New Guinea, by ship on my way home. The ship stopped in Guadalcanal for supplies, etc. This trip back to San Francisco did not take but only a few weeks. All the time that I was on board the ship, I was being treated for J.R. disease. There were many men with terrible battle wounds. Some were without arms or without legs. There were very pitiful cases.

All total, I believe that I was overseas about 37 months. I arrived in the States, if I remember, early April 1945. Upon docking, I was sent to Moore General Hospital there in S.F. While I was in San Francisco, President Roosevelt died. It was a very sad occasion.

After a week or two in San Francisco, I was put on a train en route to Swannanoa, N.C. The train trip only took us about a week or 10 days. Upon arriving at Swannanoa General, the treatment was begun immediately on my skin condition. After a few weeks, I was declared fit to return to duty. I was put on a train and went to Camp Shelby, Miss.

At Camp Shelby, I was unassigned and unattached. Meaning that I could end up in any branch of the service. As I was walking to the mess hall one day, I heard someone yell out my name, "Hey, Hick!" As it turned out, it was my old friend Simon North. We went into the Army the same day and here we were, back in the States, together once more. I only spoke to him for a few minutes and then he had to rejoin his unit. Small world!

I was discharged from the Army in early July 1945. I was given a bus ticket to Jacksonville, Fla. And then, home at last!

There are a few things I may have forgotten to mention earlier in regard to my battery and my time with them on the Philippine Islands. I was with my outfit just a few days and no longer than a week (I think). My Battery, indeed, the whole Americal Division would stay in the Philippines until all the Japanese were routed. There was much heavy fighting going on these islands.

Ralph Harbert, my best friend and gunnery sergeant, was in those battles and he told me, (some years after the war) that the name of the operation, when the Division was to leave the islands and attack Japan was called "Operation Olympic." Ralph told me that if the Atomic Bomb had not been dropped on Japan, many more American lives would have been lost.

Ralph Harbert, Glen Register, Alphas Hill, Woodroe Wilson Herring, Ferris G. Hester, Simon North-All these men were close friends of mine, have gone to be with their *M* maker.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

WASHINGTON

4 February 1943.

Tec 5.

William E. Higginbotham

34051366.

Cited in the Name of

The President of the United States

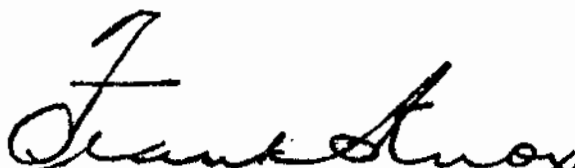
THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION, REINFORCED

Under command of

Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, U.S.M.C.

CITATION:

"The officers and enlisted men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, on August 7 to 9, 1942, demonstrated outstanding gallantry and determination in successfully executing forced landing assaults against a number of strongly defended Japanese positions on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Florida and Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, completely routing all the enemy forces and seizing a most valuable base and airfield within the enemy zone of operations in the South Pacific Ocean. From the above period until 9 December, 1942, this Reinforced Division not only held their important strategic positions despite determined and repeated Japanese naval, air and land attacks, but by a series of offensive operations against strong enemy resistance drove the Japanese from the proximity of the airfield and inflicted great losses on them by land and air attacks. The courage and determination displayed in these operations were of an inspiring order."


Secretary of the Navy.