

Don Sehmel

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Answer: Then we got back to Pavuvu and low and behold there were four Red Cross girls on the dock. First girls we'd seen since Australia. Course you couldn't get close to them or anything, but they did have four Red Cross girls there. I don't remember if they gave us anything or not, I don't think so but we got to see women anyhow for maybe 4 minutes, 5 minutes while we got onto a truck, anyhow, after a week or two we were told that Bob Hope and his group were over on an island called (Bonica?) And they had heard about the 1st marine division and it was not on his schedule but he wanted to come over and put on a show for us. So Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna, Frances Langford and Patty Thomas flew over in little one man planes, observation planes, and they put on a show and the whole division was there and that was about 18,000 men you know on the beach. And they really put on a nice show for us and everybody was very happy and thankful that he had done that and then it was training again, boredom, and the time in-between campaigns is very boring even if you are training.

The first part why they don't load it on very heavy because you're supposed to be recuperating but you go see the same movies again at night and kill land crabs and watch out for falling coconuts. And anyhow then after a month or two we go down to Guadalcanal again for more training and then we are off on another campaign and we had heard about Iwo Jima then and Iwo Jima was another deal like Peleliu only three divisions there instead of only one. And so that sort of had us a little bit fearful of the coming campaign and after we were at sea we were told it was Okinawa and that Okinawa was only 350 miles from Japan and was probably going to be just like Iwo which didn't make us very happy. And we pulled into a place in the Caroline Islands called Ulithe Which was 100 to 200 miles from Peleliu and it was taken without any opposition but it was one of the greatest anchorage's for the navy in the Pacific. They could put the whole Pacific Fleet in it. Anyhow we were there for a day or two, maybe it was four days, anyhow a number of us were allowed to go to a little island ashore called Mogmog And we were all given two cans of beer which was a highlight. Then just before we left Ulithe Why a smoking rusted looking aircraft carrier came steaming in which was the Franklin which maybe you've heard about. It was hit by kamikazes and 700 sailors were killed on it and it remained afloat and it got all the way back to New York I understand. And then after.. Okinawa. D-Day was April 1, which was Easter Sunday and April Fool's Day, and we were dumped out about ten miles at sea and went towards shore in our amphibian tractors. And by then they had gotten the ones with the door that folded down in the back and then a naval barrage was going on and boy we thought oh man this is going to be a massacre. And we went in and hit the beach, not a shot was fired, and there wasn't any Japs around and we couldn't get over it you know. What a joy, and within a matter of 3-4 hours Yontan Airport, which was the biggest airport on the island was captured. And within a day or two our mission which was to cut the island in half, we got to the other side of the island which was our destination point and I imagine the first 3-4 days maybe a dozen people were killed. Unbelievable. Couldn't get over it. Anyhow our mission was to go to the north end of the island and we went to the north end and accomplished our mission without any real combat at all. The 6th marine division which had the position along the coast going north had some relatively stiff combat in a place called Motobu Peninsula and the three army divisions were running into minor combat as they headed south. Well, after about two weeks we heard that Roosevelt died and then things started heating up in the south end of the island and the army ran into some major resistance and it was the north end had been taken by that time by the 1st and 6th marine divisions and so we would pull into the southern lines so there was now the 1st, the 6th, the 7th, the 77th, 27th and 96th division. There was I think 7 divisions on the front as we headed south and it got to be rough. Very similar to Peleliu and eventually on June 21st the campaign on Okinawa was over and we were sent back to the north end of the island for our rest and training while we were to get ready for the invasion of Kyushu. And fortunately unbeknown to any of us a new kind of bomb was dropped on August 6th and we had a little bulletin board in our tent area and there was mention made of it and then on August 9th there was another one dropped and the next thing we knew about the tenth there

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was a pin up on the bulletin board that there was a possibility that the war was going to be over and on the 14th the war ended. My 20th birthday. Pretty happy. Unbelievable almost. We were all pretty happy. The jungle juice flowed and then about a week went by and we got orders we were going to Tientsin, China, to disarm the Japs. And I'd been overseas 33 months at that time and all the men that had been over 30 months or more were going to go home to the states so the 1st division left for China and we stayed on at Okinawa awaiting transportation and two real severe typhoons hit the island and then eventually about the 6th of November we got transportation back to the states. We landed in San Diego, climbed aboard trucks, welcome home. Just climbed aboard trucks, went out to Camp Pendleton, to await discharge and we didn't have any money because our records weren't there. Couldn't have liberty because our records weren't there, so we killed about three weeks of time doing nothing. Finally they gave us some liberty cards but where we were in Pendleton was about 23 miles from the town of Oceanside and everybody said there wasn't much at Oceanside so never did go on liberty.

But on the 23rd of December I got discharged and there was no transportation because there was so many getting discharged but we knew there was no transportation so we put on the bulletin board, anybody going to Seattle? And so myself and four other guys signed up and someone called his brother-in-law in Seattle, this was about a week or so before discharge day, and he drove down from Seattle to San Diego and we all put in our share and drove 29 hours without stopping and got back in Tacoma on Christmas Eve and my bride and my parents were there to pick me up. So that is the tale of my war years.

Question: Was your, your bride had been your girl friend?

Answer: Well, no, well I had dated her in high school. I considered her my girl friend. She didn't consider me as her boy friend but we started dating right away and six months later we were married. I fooled around for a year and a half working in an auto mechanic shop and then went to school on the GI bill and went to college for five years and became a pharmacist and worked for five years and then started my own drug store and had a drug store for 24 years, then I'd always wanted to be involved in real estate so I got rid of the drug store and became an associate broker and worked in real estate for 20 years, retired on my 70th birthday.

Question: Sounds like, if there is the best part of the war, then the GI bill must have been.

Answer: Oh that was great, because I'm doubtful I would have ever been able to go to college. It was great and the government got back everything that it invested boy in income taxes.

Question: If that was the better part of the war, what in your mind was the worst part of the war for you.

Answer: The worst part of the war for me was Peleliu.

Question: Because of the loss of

Answer: It was just difficult in the loss of a lot of buddies; I still can't hardly get over it, I mean it was bad.

Question: Do you think there is a message that needs to be left for future generations that you and I will ever meet?

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Answer: Well, I don't know what the messages would be but I'm very very proud that I was in and proud of the marine corp. In fact, tomorrow we are leaving for a get together of buddies down in California for a four day camp out where we drink a little beer, eat some barbecue and ribs and spin a lot of stories and renew old acquaintances and.

Question: Can you describe the I mean your life is this big world war II is this big but yet when I hear vets talk about their fellow veterans the bond you have sounds so unique. Is there any way to put it into words? What is so different about that, is it different than any other friendship you have? Any other part of your life?

Answer: Yes it is, they are very close. When someone wrote that about a band of brothers he that sheds blood for me, its hard to explain, you can't really but boy the bond is there and of course they told you in boot camp, after boot camp they called us marines for the first time, and I remember that day and they said you'll be a marine for life, and that certainly is true.

Question: And, yet, I think the interesting thing is that in the history books when there is a heroic act but yet you were a bunch of average Joe's. The kid from Gig Harbor that...

Answer: Well that's one of the things is to see the unselfishness of some of the people you met. Pretty unbelievable, for example I don't know of any of my friends, but I know it happened on numerous times because I've read the congressional medal of honor list in our division and I would say in maybe 8-10 cases where a grenade would be thrown into a fox hole with a couple of guys and one would jump on it. You can't explain stuff like that.