

# **PACIFIC WAR QUEST**



**TRAVELOGUE  
REVISITING MY WWII MARINE  
CAMPAIGN SITES**

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# **IN MEMORY**

Of those young faithful warriors who gave their all for their country in those far-flung World War II Pacific battle sites that are becoming less known by each new generation. They will remain forever young—for them there would be no time of peace, no family life, no career and no re-walking of those places that were military objectives during times of intense combat.

## **ITINUARY**

### **GUADALCANAL**

### **TARAWA**

### **SAIPAN**

### **TINIAN**

### **OTHER ISLANDS**

## **BACKGROUND**

This is a travelogue version of my two published books, both titled *Faithful Warriors*. The first version was self-published in 1993-4 while the second was published by *The US Naval Institute Press* in 2009 and marketed world-wide by all major book distributors such as *Amazon* and *Barnes and Noble*. It is also available on E-books and samples of the text are also displayed at such as at *Amazon.com*. My contract with the publisher includes the eventuality of making it into a movie so I am pursuing contacts for a production, similar to *Pacific*.

Those books incorporated only a few of these photos and they were printed without color. I have used colored slides of these photos, and about 80 others, in speaking to many audiences since writing my first book.

Rather than just being a dying reminiscence of the past, that period of blood and tears is now viewable by the unlimited website audience of new generations. The writers of old would envy the advantages of this ever-developing technology.

After retiring in 1980 as a project management engineer at Lockheed, I decided to revisit my WW II sites--while I was still physically able and had

airline standby-fare privileges while my daughter was still a cabin attendant with TWA after nearly nine years.

My first very ambitious adventure was in late 1982, when I roughed it for six non-scheduled weeks, wondering what next--visiting about thirteen islands with camera, tape recorder and even a light pup tent for mosquito and rain protection if needed. Instead, I found it easy to make contact and stay with the locals--thus becoming better acquainted with their culture as compared to being like an ordinary tourist, looking around and buying souvenirs.

I have since returned more times, but they were scheduled without unknowns and were much less extensive than that first. This travelogue includes some photos of those subsequent trips.

Before starting with details of this adventure, the following timeline provides the most significant dates about events of my unit--the First Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, during WW II:

1940	Nov. 8	Reserves called to active duty.
1941	Feb. 1	2 <sup>nd</sup> Marine Div. activated at Camp Elliott, CA.
1942	Jan. 20	Arrived at Samoa.
	Oct. 25	Left Samoa for Guadalcanal.
	Nov. 4	Landed on Guadalcanal.
	Nov. 6-8	Searched for newly landed enemy.
	Nov. 10	First combat engagement.
	Nov. 12-15	Naval Battle of Guadalcanal.
	Nov. 18-19	Spearheaded assault across the Matanikau River.
	Nov. 23	My platoon received heavy casualties.
	Dec. 31	Enemy decided to evacuate the island.
1943	Jan. 13	Began our final offensive.
	Jan. 31	Boarded ship for New Zealand.
	Nov. 1	Departed New Zealand for Tarawa.
	Nov. 20	Assault landing on Tarawa.
	Nov. 21	I was shot through the abdomen.
	Nov. 23	Island secured.
1944	Jan. 28	I rejoined my unit at Parker Ranch camp on Hawaii after 2 months recovery in hospital at Pearl Harbor.
	May 30	Departed from Pearl Harbor for Saipan.
	June 15	Assault landing on Saipan.
	July 2	I was wounded in right elbow by our own artillery.
	July 7	Enemy made largest counter attack of the Pacific War.
	July 8	Mopped-up and buried thousands of enemy.
	July 24	Assault landing on Tinian.
	Aug 1	Island declared secured.
	Aug 8	I, with others who had served 31 months overseas, departed for the States while the rest continued on to Okinawa and Japan.

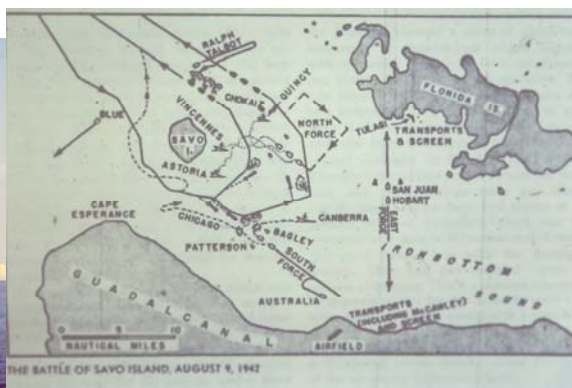
## GUADALCANAL

Below left (B/L) Displays my service ribbons & marksmanship medals includes the following:

Campaign ribbons—Purple Heart with 2 stars for a major wound at Tarawa and two minor ones at Saipan. Unit Presidential Citation with 2 stars for combat at Guadalcanal and Tarawa. General service ribbons for service before WW II and for the Asian-Pacific theater with 4 campaign stars.

Various marksmanship medals.

Below right (B/R) Shows where the Second Marine Division served in WW II Pacific island campaigns.

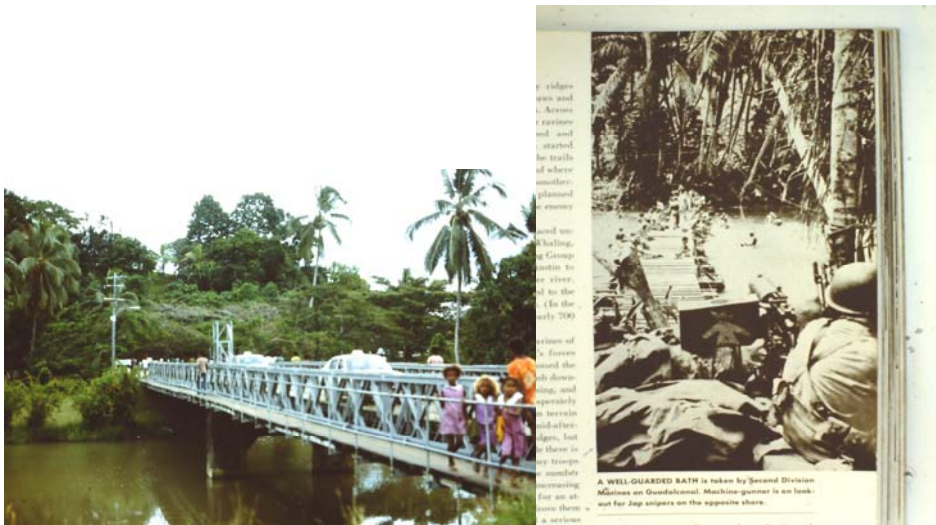


Upper left (U/L) Savo Island, a few miles northerly from Guadalcanal around which the disastrous Naval Battle of Savo Island was fought. That

occured the night following landing of Marines--including part of the Second Division that met heavy resistance at nearby Tulagi and Gavutu. U/R (Previous page) This naval battle track displays how Japanese ships made a surprise attack on August 9--sinking four of our cruisers (Astoria, Vincennes, Quincy and Australian Canberra) with no loss of their ships. This was our Navy's greatest operational naval defeat.

L/L Wreath laying ceremony in 1982 aboard the new Australian frigate, Canberra, over the site of the sunken cruiser, Canberra.

L/R Islander Sir Jacob Vouza and his policeman son David aboard the Australian frigate. He holds William Manchester's book, *Goodby Darkness* that was my guide for contacts and places. Vouza died a few years later.



U/L WW II Bailey bridge over the Matanikau River.

U/R Earlier guarded pontoon bridge that I went across, leading reconnaissance patrols into no-man's land.



**L/L** Near that bridge, very friendly Islander boys all tried to get into the photo. Wonder how many will now finally see this on their computer?  
**L/R** I am standing with my new Japanese veteran friend, then Capt. Akio Tani, at his 105 mm gun that had fired very close to my WW II position.



**U/L** Tani shows me where his gun position was located near the beach--concealed by the trees, and surprisingly never revealed during combat. He told the native boys that next time he would bring them some candy!  
**U/R** Tani fired his artillery at our Henderson field and ships from this site, where he could gage range from water splash and then traverse inland.

**L/L** (Next page) British project engineer points out Japanese aircraft engine, unearthed during construction of a new water tank, below the enemy CP site further up the White River.  
**L/R** Tani showed where a newly landed unit held a rear-guard position to the last man along this river so he and thousands of others could withdraw.



**L/L Visiting Tani in 1985 at his Tokyo home with Ohno, their colonel's runner. He wears his tattered combat shirt and tells about those days.  
L/R Marine Raider vet with chief's daughter along the White river in a rustic village. Today's changing culture and dwellings are nearby.**



**U/L Native boys at the same village living like old culture.  
U/R Dugout canoe under construction according to old way.**



**L/L Gibertese dancing girls that moved to this island.  
L/R Islander, Fred Kona, who owns this outdoor museum at Vilu,  
introduces WW II Australian coast-watcher Martin Clemens.**



**U/L Marine Ace Joe Foss and wife at the Vilu ceremony. I met the pre-war missionary there who had rescued Foss after he ditched into the nearby ocean.**

**U/R Native policeman/investigator standing at my foxhole of 34 days on the front line. It is near today's Skyline Road memorial monument.**



## TARAWA

L/L Assault landing at Tarawa, Nov. 20-23 on the one square mile-sized Islet of Betio—heavily defended by about 5,000, including Korean laborers.  
L/R Artist rendering of that landing along the pier against heavy enemy fire. I was wounded at the opposite side, further out toward the reef.



U/L I was shot through the abdomen about 600 yards to the right of this photo--the first of that battle to be published in newspapers nationwide.  
U/R Locals stand at low tide among landing boat debris near where I was shot by a gun directly ahead. The water was then about 3 feet deep.

L/L (Next page) Same Red 2 beach when I returned the following year, leading some of my old rifle platoon. Dick Stein holds a can of beer rather than a rifle!

L/R At the same beach with the group I led back in 1983, standing near where the enemy machine gun was located that nearly killed me.



**Native boys show their martial arts ability while standing among Amtrac remains. These remains were nearly rusted away by my revisit there in 2010.**



**U/L Our Sherman tank off Red Beach 1 at low tide in 1983. I am on top with a New Zealander. Its gun is still pointing to where shooting when stopped. U/R Small Japanese tank that was moved to Red Beach 3 after the battle. Amazingly, loose parts still lay nearby, not moved by youth in 40 years!**



**L/L Twenty two coast-watchers, mostly New Zealanders, were beheaded here a year before our landing. This memorial has since been replaced.  
L/R Beach dual purpose gun shown by retired British naval officer.**



**U/L Bunker on the south beach near 8" gun where Japanese CO's body was found. Eighteen year-old daughter of British magistrate is on top.  
U/R Our group climbs to the top of that CO's (Adm. Shibasaki) command bunker.**



**U/L Joe Suza fought here at the electric power bunker.**



**U/R (Previous page) Part of the Japanese group, who also participated in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary occasion, included their popular WW II woman singer and a veteran (Fujihira, in the center) I had met on the previous year's trip.**

**L/L Dancing for me in full regalia at the Merchant Marine School where I slept one night during my first trip in 1982.**

**L/R Betio police band that played at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremony. One, second from the right, holds a Marine banner that I gave them.**



**U/L In 2010, I was a veteran guest with active duty Marines on a repatriation mission to return missing remains. The group is at the Marine monument, erected in 1989, near the new meeting building. I had proposed this monument during my first visit.**

**U/R Previous thatched meeting building at the same location, where I spoke for our country to many hundreds at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremony.**



**U/L** I was the guest speaker at the John de Bosco School near the island's west end. All the students marched into place to the beat of a drum.

**U/R** Young dancing girl with a gift for me at the School. It was a shark-toothed ceremonial weapon, resting on a hand-decorated pillow case.

**L/L** School teachers and students pose after the program. The teacher, 4<sup>th</sup> from the left, invited and took me to the school on her motor bike!



**U/L** Students at the Church of God school where I was a guest for several days and attended a joint meeting with another church that had split away.



**U/R (Previous page) Catholic singing group that won a singing competition involving many well prepared churches—an event unlike any I have seen in our country.**

**L/L Natives return in their outrigger canoes with a good catch of Tuna. Fishing is now even more important for subsistence living and commerce.  
L/R I visited Abemama Atoll for two days, like 100 years ago, south of Tarawa. Robert L Stevenson wrote about island life from there in 1889.**



**U/L Grave of mad King Benoka who would kill for no reason. Stevenson lived near him and must have had a worrisome experience.**

**U/R Villagers in the nearby village harvest copra, a prime export.**

## **Saipan**

**L.L (Following page) Assault landing on Saipan July 15, 1944 was one week after the Normandy landing. Artillery caused many casualties on the beach.  
L/R Saipan landing beach and Lake Susupe where I landed through heavy enemy artillery and searched for the adjacent unit's flank as night came.**





**U/L Return to Saipan landing beach in 1983 with the group I led.**

**U/R Gun bunker at the beach.**

**L/L Japanese memorial with their tank placed on their beach bunker.**

**L/R Air raid shelter that my patrol had passed during return on the first night and killed someone as he emerged.**



**L/L (Next page) Japanese artillery used as a memorial at its firing site in the foothills above our landing beach.**

**L/R Japanese Zero, anti tank gun and mine in a retired US Navy Chief's yard. He had also collected much ordinance to be disposed of.**



**U/L View from top of Mt. Tapotchau toward the landing beaches to the south, with Tinian a few miles in the distance.**

**U/R I am standing about where I was wounded along with 50 other casualties by our own artillery on Mt Tapotchau. The trees are gone.**

**L/L Our group tells school children about this being our field hospital that had been a Japanese control center, converted into a school after the war.**

**L/R War debris where we were Invited to share Sunday picnic with locals at this Japanese banzai area. Compare this to the following WW II photo.**







**U/L Japanese banzai dead at the same location where we buried about 4,000 July 10-12, 1944. That was the war's largest enemy counter attack.**  
**U/R Where I walked back to our aid station to replace my wound dressing. Forty, that I had passed through, were killed in another banzai that night.**

**L/L I visited Capt. Oba at his home in Gamagori, Japan In 1985. I had passed through his men, as previously mentioned. *The Last Samurai* is his story.**  
**L/R Japanese jail on Saipan where locals speculated that Amelia Ehrhart and her navigator were held.**





**U/L (Previous page) Live ordnance of both sides was collected in the Far East Broadcasting area for disposal. Later, a weed mower struck and blew up a shell that impacted surrounding buildings without causing casualties.  
U/R Byrd Bruenemeier, center, was killed the following year (1983) adjusting high-powered station equipment located near our landing beach.**

**L/L (Next page) Looking up at Suicide Cliff, above Banzai Cliff, where many Japanese civilians jumped to their death--some carrying children with them.**

**L/Center Japanese memorial on top of the cliff. The design includes a Christian cross as well as an eastern religion sculpture.**

**L/R Bird Island with the Marpi Point cliff in the distance. The replacement engineer for Bruenemeier, previously shown, drowned here the next year.**



**U/L Banzai Cliff where many Japanese jumped to their death, rather than be captured. This is where collected ordnance was blown up in the 1980s.**

**U/R Shows Japanese prayer boards where Roy Thaxton's machineguns forced the Japanese to retreat and jump off to their death. This is an important tour spot for their families. The white memorials were funded by donations from Japanese school children. The right one faces south where their soldiers died on other islands. The left smaller one is for the children who were carried to their death off the nearby suicide cliff.**

## **TINIAN**

**L/L Unused airfield today on northern Tinian that my unit had advanced across. It was soon used by our B-29 bombers to drop the atomic bombs.  
L/R Tinian airfield shortly after WW II, looking from the west, over the small beach where we assault landed and continued toward the northern end of the island. Our bombers took off from here every few minutes to fire bomb Tokyo before finally dropping the two atomic bombs.**



**U/L Japanese AA gun in front of the city hall of San Jose (prev. Tinian Town). This city employee accompanied me around the island for a day.  
U/R Former Japanese control bunker—now used to slaughter cattle. Tinian is now one large cattle ranch, whereas it had been sugar cane and crops.**



I commanded a rifle company, deployed along this ridge top, watching in amazement as hundreds of Japanese soldiers leaped to their death rather than surrender. This was after they had ignored our ultimatum by bull horn from off-shore. They were located to our left beyond the photo's lower-left corner, whereas the Japanese civilians jumped off from the distant end.

The island was declared secured the next day, on August 2, 1944. We continued to receive casualties, however, on patrols for many more months against hold-outs on both Saipan and Tinian. One of those Japanese was Capt. Oba whom I visited in 1985 at his home in a previous photo.

### **OTHER ISLANDS**

B/L Newly set-up Japanese aircraft engines and AA guns at Rota airport, south of Tinian that are being inspected by our flight's pilots. We had bypassed this island.

B/R Stone money on the Island of Yap is considered similar to our country having gold in Ft. Knox. We also bypassed this island during the war.







**U/L** A men's meeting house on Yap, still constructed as in the past.  
**U/R** A woman on Yap, dressed in a normal grass skirt and carrying a beetle nut chews bag.

**L/L** A Japanese defense gun in a cave position on the Palau Islands.  
**L/R** A Japanese Zero lies just below the surface where it landed short of their airstrip. I surprisingly found the cockpit controls still moveable!



**U/R Smiling Japanese airline cabin attendants at the oddly eroded Palau Islands, watching clams being cut for eating.**

**U/L Their drying orange T-shirts, hang above discarded large clam shells.**

**L/L Monument on Bloody Nose Ridge at Peleliu where the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and Army fought a costly battle over very rough terrain.**

**L/R A Japanese gun at the base of the same ridge pointed at the beach. It probably caused many of our casualties during the landing.**



**U/L Truk Islands was the main Japanese naval base which we bypassed in the war but our massive air strikes destroyed much of their installations and most of their logistic ships.**

**U/R This was a Japanese gun emplacement at their seaplane base. We stayed near there at The Inter-Continental Hotel .**



**Sunset at the Abemama Atoll causeway near where I stayed overnight.**