# DIARY OF A GOLDBRICK

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This diary is compiled from memory. The events recorded here took place more than a generation ago and remain vivid recollections of days of trial and days of triumph. All the personalties are real people. And to those who extended the hand of friendship, I am eternally grateful.

When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor December 7th 1941, it was to be part of their grand design to create for themselves a sphere of influence throughout Asia extending through China, Burma and as far south as Singapore. All of the Pacific west of California, Oregon and Washington was to be Japanese controlled.

There was little to hinder them. They possessed a powerful army, navy and air force with very little to oppose them. The Australians and New Zealanders had joined Britain in the war against Germany leaving at home only a skeleton force. The Asian Mainland was tired after years of fighting Japanese occupation and tyranny.

Indeed, these were dark days. Our Pacific Fleet had been badly damaged, and the services of our Army and Air Force were required on two fronts. Priorities had to be set so it was decided to establish a base in Australia where men and supplies would be accumulated against the day they would be used in an all out offensive against Japan.

Approximately 1,400 miles northeast of Brisbane, Australia and due east of New Guinea lay the Island of Guadalcanal. The Japanese had occupied the Island, a British Possession, with approximately 15,000 men and were proceeding with the construction of an airfield which when completed could be used as a base for aircraft to harass

American shipping en route to Australia. Guadalcanal lay directly between the United States and Australia, and in enemy hands remained a direct threat to our successful prosecution of the war against Japan. Guadalcanal had to be taken and the threat removed.

So it was that 15,000 Army men boarded the good ship "Uruguay" at Brooklyn, New York bound for Guadalcanal via Melbourne, Australia and New Caledonia. Though we didn't know it at the time, we were destined to roll up an enviable record as the Americal Division. The SS Uruguay was to become known as "the Floating Latrine".

As the ship slipped away from the dock we were ordered below decks. For security reasons no bodies were to be visible from above, below or ashore. As luck would have it, though, a lead pipe two inches in diameter pierced the hull in our area so each of us took turns peering through and getting our last look at the Brooklyn shoreline. It was a good hour before a ships' officer discovered our "periscope" and had it removed and the hole covered with steel plate.

A couple of hours later we were at sea and allowed on deck. The sight which awaited us left us gaping. Accompanying our three ship column of transports was an impressive display of strength which we never imagined existed. One aircraft carrier, three cruisers and four destroyers. Overhead were an assortment of aircraft and a blimp. German submarines were known to be in the area. As one fellow said, "If we're torpedoed, somebody will sure hear about it".

The third morning we awoke to find our escorts gone. We were headed into the Panama Canal. The dock at the entrance to the canal was teeming with the G.I.'s and as we tied on First Sergeant Davis circulated among us announcing that the first five men to raise their

right hands could go ashore. Without thinking I shoved my hand into the air and found myself with four others headed down the gangplank onto the dock. It was a beautifully sunny day, and as I looked around for the exit I heard a familiar voice bellow an order, "O.K. you guys, load them bananas." I had been in the army eight months and was still taken in by not following the unwritten law: THOU SHALL NOT VOLUNTEER.

The trip through the Canal was a spellbinder: the little locomotive pulling our ship from lock to lock; the wait each time we went through a lock for the water level to be adjusted in the succeeding lock; and on each side anti-aircraft emplacements and the G.I.'s patrolling the area. Finally we got through, entering the Pacific. We were on our way, to, as far as we knew, an unknown destination. We were five days west of Panama when for some reason never divulged the ships' engines just went dead. Everything went off, including electricity and water. We were sitting ducks for Jap subs. One of our escorts, a cruiser, came alongside, tied on and stretched a hose over to us. Meanwhile, we were standing at the bow of our vessel bantering with some sailors on the cruiser. The conversation went something like this:

We: "What keeps that old barge afloat?"

Sailors: "Hot air coming from your side."

We: "By the way, do those things shoot?" (pointing to the forward turrets comsisting of four guns capable of throwing a large shell twelve miles.)

We received our answer in unequivocal terms. There was a loud roar as four guns fired almost in unison.

We stood in stunned amazement looking in the direction of the target, and about a minute later a puff of smoke appeared on the horizon. There was an explosion then silence. That was the end of an enemy submarine.

Life aboard a troop transport is generally monotonous, but ours was the exception. The SS Uruguay was a vessel of twenty thousand tons and never designed to accommodate 15,000 men, plus crew. In peace time she plied between North and South America and was considered a luxury passenger vessel carrying freight in addition. But then her engines never failed nor did the electricity go out, and thereby hangs a tale. After several hours, about eight to be exact, there was set in motion an event which was to be the precursor of a night of hectic activity which those aboard the "Floating Latrine" would never forget.

The number of men aboard created a logistics problem for the mess officer. A cardinal rule of army life was to see that enlisted men were supplied with three meals a day. Short of a catastrophe the mess officer was held responsible in accomplishing this and any deviation usually brought forth an irate Colonel demanding to know not only why the men were not being fed but what was being done about it. In some instances a general might enter the fray. The number of personnel involved was no excuse. So, the solution simply and expeditiously evolved was a continuous chow line from six a.m. to ten p.m. This way everyone who was hungry simply got in line.

It so happened that the meal prepared by the cooks happened to be frozen, defrosted then re-frozen turkey. It was good, and the word got around--fast. The chow line trebled in length. In the

Officers' Mess too, everyone was remarking on how good it was and that the chef (not cook) had at last revealed his true talents.

It was a gala night. Even the General appeared satisfied. I was not hungry and had turned in about six o'clock and was sleeping soundly when I was awakened by Johnny Giuliante who occupied the adjacent hammock. He was picking himself up off the deck, and I asked him if he made it a practice to fall noisily from his hammock every morning at one a.m. He muttered something under his breath as he proceeded hastily toward the latrine. Others began to stir. I sensed something was amiss, slid into my shoes and made my way up to the promenade deck. The sight which met my eyes I could not believe.

The Medical detachment had set up tables the length of the deck, and stacked them with syringes and serum. A medic reached for my arm.

"How you feeling?" he asked.

"Fine," I replied, and walked away to return to the privacy of my hammock. I had just gotten my feet off the deck when a Medical officer appeared and reassured everyone with the command:

"Everyone up on deck who ate the turkey!! That is, if you don't want to spend the rest of the trip in the head."

In a couple of hours it was all over. Those who required the "shots" had gone to sleep and what was left of the turkey was to be unloaded at the next port then incinerated.

Shipboard routines went on. Water was rationed for drinking purposes and showers were open two hours a day. Every fourth man was given a bar of salt water soap and told to share it with five

others. This was essential as only salt water was supplied for the showers and this type soap was the only kind which would lather.

Every day we hosed down and mopped the decks. Quite an undertaking considering the number of people we had to displace. And so it was until our next port of call--Bora Bora.

2,600 miles south of Honolulu and 3,100 miles east of Brisbane, Australia lay the Society Islands and the Island of Bora Bora. In 1767, Samuel Wallis claimed the Society Group for Great Britain and in 1768 Louis Antoine de Bougainville claimed them for France. Apparently Louis outnumbered Sammy as the Society Group became a French protectorate in 1843. Bora Bora and its Polynesian society are included in this group, and this particular Island became host to a part of the submarine force of the United States Navy.

Our approach to Bora Bora was quite startling. One moment we were cruising along with nothing in sight on the horizon and the next moment land mass appeared, gigantic in height and in the form of a green mountain of sugar. It was beautiful and startling at the same time. Because from twenty miles the Island appeared to consist of only one tremendous hill rising out of the ocean. Within an hour, we were off shore and had dropped anchor. There, within three hundred yards was the most magnificent beach I had ever seen. It had the whitest sands imaginable and stretched for about three unbroken miles. Beyond rose that majestic mountain bearing continuous green foliage to its very peak.

The beach was a beehive of activity. Hoses stretched from shore to submarines as fueling got underway. And small craft sped from sub to sub with supplies and mail from home.

It was a warm day and the water looked very inviting. So we sought out the Division Commander and received permission to swim ashore provided we were back within the hour.

We went to the lower deck, shed everything but our shorts, and dove in. It was great. And then the three of us headed for the beach. As we approached there was a flurry of activity. Aha, we thought, they were putting out the welcome mat for us. But as we shortly discovered it was just the opposite, and for good reason.

A short distance behind that Navy Shore Patrol was case upon case of beer. And the Shore Patrol, twenty strong, were prepared to defend to the death their supply. No Army man would set foot upon their beach. Nor would he harm a single can of the precious brew. And we were not allowed to set foot on the beach. We demanded, cajoled and teased, but to no avail. So, we swam back to our ship. Shortly after we boarded we again set sail and were told to assemble on deck forward of the bridge for information relating to our next port of call. It was to be Auckland, New Zealand. A real go-go place! Real go-go!

After zigzagging across what appeared to be half the Pacific we pulled into a magnificent harbor and docked at a pier in downtown Auckland.

It was noon and it was Saturday. The water was alive with small sailing craft set off against a backdrop of homes which dotted the shoreline south and west of harbor.

No one was to be allowed ashore. As it turned out, the only reason for the stop was to receive our orders to either debark at

Auckland or proceed to Melbourne. The word was "Proceed". Due west across the Tasman Sea, and 2,200 statute miles from Auckland lay Melbourne, Australia.

Australia, about the size of the United States and with a population of approximately twelve million people, is in the southern hemisphere. Therefore, seasons are reversed. When it is summer in the United States it is winter down under--the equator.

The first reference to Australia was published in Portugal in 1542. Therein it was referred to as "a land beyond the East Indies." However, in 1770 Captain James Cook landed at Botany Bay on the east coast of Australia and claimed the entire coast for England.

Since leaving the United States, our trip had been smooth and uneventful weatherwise. The Pacific had lived up to its name. We didn't know it, but things were to be different. We were entering the Tasman Sea, reputedly the roughest body of water in the world.

As we proceeded toward Melbourne, the motion of our vessel grew more perceptible. The roll became more pronounced and the bow began to rise higher and fall further with greater regularity. As the pitch and roll of the vessel gathered momentum with increasingly heightened wave action, passengers became unstable and full fledged seasickness began to ensue.

Meanwhile, things were happening on another vessel in the convoy. The ship was the same size as ours but had a slightly different passenger list. Men and--mules! Yes, a mule battalion. They were invaluable in rough terrain impassable for motorized equipment, and each mule could carry about three hundred pounds of food and equipment

for many hours without tiring. But, at this very moment, they were useless, a casualty of seasickness. As the seas became more violent, so the vessel rolled and pitched with greater intensity, and at times the bow went down so deeply that the stern cleared the water revealing the propeller.

But all good things must come to an end. And one fine morning we awoke to find the sea serene and the coast of Australia off the starboard bow. In the distance was the Port of Melbourne. As we drew closer, a small Australian military plane flew by at deck level, the pilot waving a welcome. As he drew away, we turned slowly to starboard and gradually pulled into the dock. Our long voyage was over.

The ship docked with ease; the gangplanks were put in position and we proceeded to debark. As we reached the dock we fell into formation with our own units. The Infantry formed into Companies of a predetermined number, and we formed Field Artillery Batteries of one hundred twenty men each and awaited our equipment. It was not long in coming. Large cranes aboard ship lifted huge trucks, jeeps and guns from the hold followed by ammunition and food. Guns were hooked to the trucks which would haul them to our destination, and the remainder of the supplies were placed on appropriate carriers. In a short time, we were ready to roll. There was only one hitch. There was a dock strike on in Melbourne, and in addition to there being no dock workers to assist as anticipated, they had locked the huge wrought iron gates at the entrance to the pier so there was no way out, or so they thought. Outside the gates the striking

dock workers just stood and laughed at us. One of them asked if we planned to fly our equipment over the fence. We were ordered not to respond.

As we wondered what we were to do next an army staff car pulled up. Tow men got out. One was General Douglas MacArthur. He said something to the leader of the strikers then turned to our Division Commander and in a loud clear voice issued the following order, "If the gates are not opened within five minutes run through them with your tanks." With that he re-entered his car and was driven away.

The pier was suddenly vibrant with action. Tank engines started and the drivers maneuvered into position. Suddenly the gates opened and the tanks rumbled through. A serious crisis had been averted.

Trucks followed the tanks. Some with personnel aboard and others hauling guns and equipment. The truck I was riding in hauled a 105 MM Howitzer and had two men in the cab beside myself. Our destination was Royal Park --The bivouac area for the outfit. We had received verbal instructions relating to our route and that was it. No map. As we passed through the gate Johnny Giuliante, Fred Matusz and I looked at each other. We nodded in agreement, and though not a word had been spoken, Fred swung the truck to the left in a wide circle, and then started up Collins Street in search of a restaurant.

Collins Street is to Melbourne what LaSalle Street is to Chicago, the heart of the financial and business district. It was Sunday and it looked as though we were going to be out of luck when Johnny spotted a small restaurant so we pulled to the curb and stopped. We jumped out of the cab and proceeded to enter the restaurant salivating all the while when we stopped in our tracks. Looking at Fred, Johnny and I said, "What do we do with the gun?"

Fred looked at us in disgust. "Each of you put half of it on your hip pocket."

We entered the restaurant and requested a table adjacent to the window so we could keep an eye on our gun. It would have been disastrous to have our 105 MM Howitzer hijacked. What explanation could we possibly have for the Battery commander. Then we gave some attention to the menu.

It was a menu such as had never before seen. It consisted mostly of lamb and mutton dishes prepared twelve different ways each. Ane one other thing--steak and eggs. This was a combination which aroused our curiosity.

"They must be kidding!" Fred exclaimed. "Steak maybe; eggs maybe. But not the two together. Let's give it a whirl."

The waitress came over and inquired if we were ready to order.

"You bet" I said. "We'll have steak and eggs."

She looked at me a moment and then asked, "How many eggs each?" impatiently tapping her foot.

Without batting an eyelash came my incisive and decisive response, "Eight." I sat back to await results.

For ten minutes nothing happened. Then a tray appeared--a huge tray followed by our waitress, and on it were three orders of steak with eight eggs. They were the best steak and eggs we had ever tasted, and the best we were to have for a long time.

We finished lunch in about an hour and filed out of the restaurant full and contented. The truck and the gun were there unmolested and so were quite a few sightseers wondering if the entire American Army made it a practice to leave unattended their equipment while they dined.

We assured them that such was not case. That this was a special gun which could be mobile under specific conditions with which we alone were acquainted. And before there were more questions, we pulled away.

We stayed on Collins Street and in about a quarter of an hour arrived at Royal Park. Without doubt, the greenest park we had ever seen. And it was adjacent to the zoo. And in the zoo were some kangaroos and one Koala bear. We immediately wanted to adopt him as the Battery Mascot.

Melbourne was an old fashioned and hospitable city. The people were cordial and everything possible was done to make us feel at home.

The Menzies Hotel was THE place to go, and it was quite fashionable even then at tea time. And Jack Mercer made a point of taking three of us to tea one Sunday.

He was manager of our Melbourne plant, and the day after I arrived, I appeared on his doorstep unannounced. When he first saw me he was speechless for about ten seconds, then blurted out, "What are you doing here?"

I had met Jack briefly in 1935 when he was transferred from Montreal to Melbourne to take over as General Manager. He had visited New York for a week before going to Australia. Being an Australian by birth, he was really looking forward to going home. He had two daughters, Daphne, age nineteen and Iris, age thirteen. And he had a lovely wife, Vera. They lived in a small home on the outskirts of Melbourne, and were a closely knit family. Their hospitality and warmth made my ten days in Melbourne a memorable occasion.

We awoke on the eleventh morning of our stay to find our brief interlude was at an end.

We had breakfast at six a.m. and by seven were at the dock and loading onto transports. By nine o'clock the gangplanks were removed and we were on our way. We were wondering where we were heading. Soon the answer came over the ships' public address system: New Caledonia. There would be a briefing at ten hundred hours giving us the highlights on our destination; the area; the people; and whatever else they had.

New Caledonia, we were told, was a French island covering about 6,500 square miles. It was about the size of Hawaii, and had a coast-line 800 miles long. It lay 750 miles east of Australia and had a population of 85,000 people made up of 43,000 Melanesians, 25,000 Europeans, mostly French, and the rest were mine laborers from Java, and Indochina. Minerals are the Islands' chief resource and provide almost inexhaustible sources for nickel and chromium. In addition, New Caledonia is a fine source for steak and roast beef as large cattle herds roam the lush feeding areas amply supplied with ever growing grass kept always moist by the annual rainfall in excess of 43 inches. Noumea is the capital and largest city, and nickel mines may be found beneath the harbor which makes Noumea the port for the island.

The Japanese were threatening the island, and a small landing party had made a brief incursion and walked off with all the currency in the Banque de L'Indochine just before we landed on April 25, 1942.

As we approached Noumea Harbor from the sea, the island appeared to be a virtual paradise. Extending back from the large U shape of the harbor was the city of Noumea which rose from the water's edge to plateau out its height giving a panoramic view of the harbor itself and the sea beyond. There stood the residences of the governor of the island and other local officials. Down near the water's edge stood the majestic old hotel and some small shops.

The hotel was something to behold. Old and somewhat rickety, it appeared ready to collapse at any moment. In fact, it was quite sturdy. Beneath the hotel were stables in which at one time many years ago horses were accommodated when the local land owners visited the city. Here is where we spent our first night, and I can distinctly recall thinking as I fell asleep in my spacious "stall", 'Oh, for the life of a French horse.'

The next morning, as they say, dawned bright and clear and after a hearty breakfast consisting of dehydrated eggs and coffee we were ready to move on. The trucks were loaded, the men mounted up and the word was passed to "move out". As we proceeded along the dirt and gravel highway, it gently but steadily took us up toward the Mondue Pass. This was the final approach to the plateau which extended for miles and where the natives lived on what was extremely fertile farm land. As we approached the top of the pass, a hairpin turn to the left appeared without notice, and directly ahead was the thatched roof of a native hut. So well did it blend with its surroundings, if we had gone straight on instead of making the turn, we would have driven a five ton truck with gun attached into somebody's bedroom.

We were on the plateau now, and proceeding north along a well maintained gravel road surrounded on either side by grazing land. Every now and then a cow would look in our direction for a few seconds then go back to the business of feeding on the tall grass of which there was an abundance growing in the miles of meadow. Five miles further, we came to the outskirts of a small town which the sign proclaimed to be Boulaparei. Boulaparei was not aware of it yet, but it was to have one thousand new residents consisting of members of the 247th Field Artillery Battalion, Americal Division. We swung off the road to the left and stopped. This was to be the bivouac area. Men dismounted, trucks were unloaded and tents erected. In three hours, camps were established and each battery informed of its duties. Battery "D" was to guard the road for a distance of two miles in each direction and the ammunition dump adjacent to the bivouac area. It was a tremendous dump as all artillery on the island were to use it.

As guards were posted on the road and along the perimeter of the dump, the realities of the situation began to sink in.

The first night in our bivouac area really was an experience. I drew guard duty at the ammunition dump and my post was half a mile long. It covered a wooded area in which the ammunition was placed and I was responsible for protecting that area and seeing to it no one intruded. So shouldering my trusty musket, I proceeded to patrol my post.

The night was moonless and dark as the proverbial "black hole of Calcutta" and about midnight I heard a rustling in the woods.

It was, I figured, about one hundred yards from where I stood. I listened intently for about thirty seconds, and then was galvanized into action. "Halt", I shouted. "Who goes there?" I had visions of an enemy patrol about to attack the dump. There was no answer, so I shouted again in my firmest voice:

"Halt or I shoot." There was no response. But more noise from the same area. With this, I raised my rifle and fired five shots in the direction of the sound and hollered out:

"Corporal of the guard, post number one."

The noise in the woods had stopped. In its place, I heard the roar of a jeep's engine as the corporal and three men responded to my call for assistance.

Another jeep approached from the opposite direction and the two converged on my location. All told there were eight men, including a colonel and two captains. You see, it was the first time anyone in the division had fired a shot.

With pistols and rifles ready, men piled out of the jeeps, and the Colonel came running up to me.

"What's the trouble?" He was ready for action.

"I fired at a continuous sound in the woods. It wouldn't halt on command and I couldn't identify it." I pointed in the direction I last heard any sound.

"Good work," said the Colonel. "Stay here." Turning, he ordered, "The rest of you men follow me."

They disappeared into the woods. In a couple of minutes, there were gales of laughter, and a voice called,

"Stix, come in here and take a look at the enemy." I charged into the woods, and as I came abreast of the Colonel, I looked down and saw a dead pig. He had three bullet holes in him.

"Pretty good shooting", I observed. "Three out of five hit him. By the way, who gets the pork chops?"

The matter of who would feast on roast pork was neatly settled.

The Medical Section proclaimed the animal unfit for human consumption because of lead poisoning brought about by his wandering through an ammunition dump after dark. He was buried with full military honors.

After that incident, life was peaceful for a while--up to a point. And that point was reached about ten days later when Matus, Giuliante and Stix were stringing telephone wire cross country and north toward Pleine de Gaiac. The air force was planning a landing field at that point and Division Headquarters had ordered communications established without delay.

We were busy laying wire through a pasture when we heard a gentle "Moo". Looking around we saw a cow staring at us from about fifty yards away. Giuliante look again. "Christ, its a bull," he exclaimed.

The animal eyed us intently as we put down the reel of phone wire and unslung our rifles. He sensed combat in the offing, and lowering his head, pawed the earth with a foreleg.

"Don't shoot 'til you see the slants of his eyes," hissed Matus, taking his rifle in a firm grip and releasing the safety catch on the trigger.

That did it. With a low roar, seven hundred pounds of bull lowered his head and charged.

"Look at the s.o.b.!" shouted Giuliante excitedly.

"For Christ's sake," shouted Stix, "Shoot, don't look."

In succeeding days the pace quickened. Training intensified, and we even climbed the local mountain a couple of times for good measure. The artillery pieces we inherited from the Australians were sadly in need of repair. And as our 105 MM Howitzers were still in Melbourne there was naught to do but put in condition that which was available. We did just that with the aid of a Navy Ordinance vessel stationed in Noumea Harbor.

This ship was equipped with machinery, parts and raw material enabling its personnel to produce a nut or a torpedo plus things larger or smaller. And one more thing--they had the finest kitchen and chefs in the entire armed forces. They could prepare anything from baked beans to pate de fois gras and while a couple of us waited for the machine shop to produce a few small parts for our guns, we had a meal, the thought of which makes my mouth water to this day. Thirty-seven years has not dimmed the memory of the flavor of the cream of mushroom soup or the roast beef, hot rolls, and last but far from least--the applie pie with its flaky crust.

As we left the ship with the parts, an officer was overhead mentioning the army always seemed to arrive at mealtime. How right he was.

We were really starting to enjoy life. The climate was cool and comfortable temperatures never exceeding 80 degrees during the

the day nor dropping below 55 degrees at night, and some of the fellows discovered that the mayor of Boulaparei had a fine wine cellar and a good looking daughter.

Her age was a matter of speculation, and not a few bets were placed as to the maximum and minimum range. Joe Combs finally put the whole subject into focus by stating that in Harlan County, Kentucky you judge a filly's age by the condition of her teeth. All of a sudden the Battalion had 850 dentists. Just as things were getting really comfortable, rumors began popping. The first one was a real lulu--The Homefront morale was at low ebb and we were sailing for San Francisco to cheer up the civilian population. Another rumor began running rampant, and it was real persistent. A group of Navy nurses were under siege in New Zealand and we were going to liberate them from the Marines. But, the one which stood the test of time was that we were going someplace, and would find out where very soon. And several days later, First Sergeant Davis announced at morning formation that this very day the battalion would be turned into a bunch of monkeys as we would be practicing climbing and descending combat nets connected to a real live ship in Noumea Harbor. We had a half hour to get ready to move out. The uniform of the day--Fatigues. This was prophetic.

We arrived at the harbor an hour and a half later and full of ginger. We'd go up and down those nets as if we were filled with helium and rocks. It would be a lead pipe cinch.

As the trucks stopped and we dismounted, we saw the launches prepared to take us out to the vessel in the middle of the harbor. A few minutes later, we started to board them, and one by one as they filled up, they headed for the ship.

The ship grew larger and longer, and the nets higher as we got closer. Sailors peered down at us from the deck, and before we realized it we were along side.

"First wave proceed up the net." The order was loud, terse and definite. We clambered to the first rung and started slowly up six abreast. That is, we were six abreast to begin with, but that rapidly changed as some went up faster than others. We had to keep moving, no matter how slow we were, as we were followed by others also bent on reaching the deck as rapidly as they could.

Suddenly I reached the top and a sailor grabbed my belt and literally hoisted me over the rail. Then he turned to assist the man behind me.

I searched out Giuliante and we both sat down. The deck felt good. Fred Matusz joined us in time to hear the three of us called to lead the first group on the descent.

This was a different kettle of fish, for as I looked over the rail all I saw was a lot of water and what appeared to be a pint size launch containing two sailors.

The launch was gently rising and falling with the ocean swell, and one of the sailors held the bottom of the landing net. I turned to Fred and whispered, "Let's resign this job."

Then the order came. "Proceed to descend." We swung over the rail and slowly started down. That water looked mighty wet and very deep, and the launch bobbed up and down like a cork. Then I was down. I remember the sailor who held the net saying, "Step in the launch, Don't jump." I stepped in.

The day dragged on to its inevitable conclusion, Sunset and Fatigue. One thousand men had gone up and down those nets three times and as a G. I. from Alabama put it, "That's a cotton pickin' way to fight a war." and fell asleep.

After that exercise, we began to get restless and anxious to get going. We'd sit up late at night speculating which ranged from Alaska to no place. We were destined to sit out the war here in New Caledonia. The latter was bad news as the Mayor of Boulaparei would not find his wine cellar inexhaustible.

And THEN IT HAPPENED. Orders came down to break camp, proceed to Noumea where we would pick up our 105 MM Howitzers and await further instructions.

The outfit showed a sudden "zip". A get up and go. We were off to Tokyo and nothing could stop us. Bets were placed as to who would be the first man on the Ginza. And it all came to an abrupt halt on orders from Headquarters to the effect that all references to our destination, whether real or fancied, were a breach of security and would immediately cease. But, that couldn't stop us from thinking.

We arrived at the harbor to find our guns on the dock beside a medium size vessel which was to be our home for an undetermined period. Combat loading was the order of the day which meant all items were to be put on board in the order we would need them when we reached our destination. In other words--last on first off. And the last on were the trucks, guns and ammunition, followed, of course, by us.

One officer boarded with a rather bulky field pack--bulkier than usual, and the Colonel asked him what was in it. He hesitated a

moment, then sheepishly told the Colonel he could never resist a bargain and had bought an unusual outboard motor. The Colonel had it heaved over the side--not governmental issue.

We settled down in our new quarters. Unlike the ship we took to Melbourne from New York, this was not overcrowded and provided three meals a day. Sort of being fattened for the slaughter. We had a "mail call" shortly after boarding and I received a letter from home which informed me my friend of many years, had been killed in Libya. He was with the British Army and a lieutenant in the Royal Welch Fusilers. Harold had lived with us in Scarsdale for a couple of years before the war and we were like brothers. We would play tennis, swim and ride together. His death was quite a blow. I found a secluded spot under a flight of stairs and wrote his parents.

I felt the deck vibrate a bit as the ship's engines started, and we slowly headed out of the harbor. It was 21 hrs. on the ship's chronometer. We had finished a good meal a couple of hours prior to departure and now we just relaxed, and some of us even cleaned our rifles. It was very quiet. An air of somber expectation hung over us like a black cloud. Where were we going? Gradually we fell asleep.

The next morning when we went on deck we found ourselves surrounded by four transports and seven Navy ships consisting of two cruisers, a battleship and four destroyers. As Giuliante said, "Where we're going, I don't know, but they don't want us killed before we get there."

With that the ship's P.A. system sounded off, "All personnel of the 247th Field Artillery Battalion assemble on the forward deck."

We started forward wondering what this was all about, and I overheard Matusz telling Giuliante, "I'm not going to like this--not one bit. I should have listened to Stix when we were practicing on the nets and resigned this job."

We sat down on the deck and when everyone had arrived Captain Jack Casey said, "You want to know where we're going. I can tell you - Guadalcanal. The Marines have been there for two months and are having a helluva time holding on to the airfield. The Japs are there in force and our mission is to give the Marines a hand and eventually drive the Japs into the sea. Any questions?" Hands shot up.

"Luchowski", said Captain Casey.

Luchowski stood up, "What is Quadalcanal like?"

"A good question," said the Captain. "Actually we know very little about it. It is 2,500 square miles in area and has mountains which go up to 8,000 feet. A lot of the area is heavy jungle and there is a road, if you can call it that, going up one side of the Island. The side we'll land on. It rains a lot, is hot as hell and loaded with coconut trees. The Japs are in the jungle, and that's about all we know at the present time. Next question."

It was obvious he wasn't going to say much. Hands shot up again. Jack Casey looked around, "Yes, Folmer."

Jack Folmer, our battery computer in the Fire Direction Center inquired, "When do we land and will we have to fight our way on?"

Captain Casey responded. "We land day after tomorrow in the early morning. As to whether the Japs will be waiting on the beach--

we don't think so, thanks to the Marines." With that, the session ended.

The "day after tommorow" arrived right on time. Guiliante confirmed it by checking his watch and informing all who would listen that indeed it must be the "day after tommorow" as the army would only awaken you for something disagreeable.

It was 0400 hours and First Sergeant Davis was informing all who would listen (heaven help you if you didn't) that chow was being served on deck and all those interested were to repair forthwith to that area whether you were interested or not. Only he didn't say it that way.

I arrived on deck and found the chow line long and waiting. Matusz allowed as how it would have been much more efficient to have had the cabin steward supply room service as the Japs would become suspicious of any large congregation of forces. Doing it as he suggested, the nips would only shell the kitchen, and that would hardly be missed.

One of the cooks appeared ready to throw a cleaver at him. He was a Navy cook, however, and not very understanding.

By 0500 hours we were through with breakfast and putting final touches to our field packs when the order came to assemble on deck. This was it.

We formed ranks on the starboard side meanwhile looking intently at the shoreline about one thousand yards away. It looked benign. No signs of life were visible along the beach, nor in the jungle which gradually evidenced itself beyond the beach. The Island did indeed appear mountainous and the quiet which then reigned was both eerie and deceptive.

Launches were about in the water below, and the ship's hatches were opened only awaiting our landing before disgorging their cargo of trucks, guns and ammunition.

"First rank board launches." The command came over the public address system. Ten men each with full field pack and rifle swung over the rail and began the slow steady descent toward the two launches below. They were rising and falling with the gentle swell coxswains exhibiting their seamanship and holding them parallel to the transport.

Suddenly we were down. We stepped off the nets into the launch and were immediately ordered to the bow clear of the net. More men were on the way. The officer of the deck looked down, and after estimating the number of us aboard called through his megaphone to coxswain, "Launch number one cleared for landing." The launch eased slowly forward and to the starboard, gathered speed, and headed for Guadalcanal.

"Everyone down below the gunwales." The order was clear and immediately executed. No one was to be shot before we hit the beach.

Matusz squatting next to me was muttering almost inaudibly, and I couldn't tell if he was praying or cussing. Days later when I asked him I got no response.

Captain Jack Casey's curiosity finally got the upper hand and he slowly raised his head to get a look at where we were going. "Get your head down Casey before some Jap blows it off." That was our Battalion Commander, Colonel Robert E. Moffet, speaking. Casey's head came down simultaneously with his, "Yes, sir!" Luchowski

complained of seasickness and Giuliante suggested he wait 'til we got ashore.

The launch slowed and the coxswain quietly told the Colonel to get ready to go ashore. Then it started to beach, the engine reversed, and the front end came down on the water with a resounding smack.

"All ashore! Let's go! Get Moving!" The order rang out. Some of us went forward down the bow piece and waded the few yards to shore. Others leapt over the sides and headed for the beach.

I looked back as I felt the land beneath my feet and saw the launch pulling away and the cranes on the ship starting to lower our trucks and guns into barges. For the first time I had an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach.

There was no shooting. Not a single sound of a lone firearm penetrated the silence. It was unreal.

Before us stood a grove of coconut trees surrounded by sparse undergrowth, and we took cover among them as we awaited the barges. An occasional raucous cry of a parrot was heard, and that was all. We saw absolutely nothing.

Suddenly the sound of an engine broke the silence and a bull dozer broke out of the jungle a lone Seabee in the driver's seat.

"You fellows need any help?" he asked. We didn't for the moment, but lost no time in plying him with questions. Where were the Japs? Do they have an air force? That is all we had time for as a gong started to sound with incessant urgency, and there were loud and vociferous calls of "Condition Red."

The Seabee on the bulldozer responded with a sense of urgency, "They do have an air force. Better take cover. I'm getting the

hell out of here." and with that turned the bulldozer on its axis and disappeared into the jungle. Then they came. Three Jap Zero's. We scattered to find cover and they made a pass at us their guns yammering. Our fighters appeared from nowhere and the battle was on. It stretched over a five mile area and ended in the downing of one zero. He hit the water in flames, there was a loud hiss and he sank. The entire incident took about five minutes. Then the first barge came in and suddenly the beach was a beehive of activity.

Amidst all of this, General Patch appeared. We liked him tremendously and dropped what we were doing and gathered around him to hear what he had to say.

"Just one thing," he said, "when enemy aircraft are on a strafing run, forget what they taught you in basic training about lying face down. You men with rifles and machine guns shoot at them from a standing position. You officers use your 45's. When an airplane has 5,000 rifles shooting at it the law of averages says sometime you must hit it. You do, and I guarantee they won't return to this section of the beach. The Marines had the same experience on Tulagi. They got one, and that's the last time they tried strafing that area. I've got to go now. Good hunting!!" As the General left, we all felt ten feet tall. To hell with Nips.

Material was really starting to move ashore now. Barges were making their runs with increasing rapidity. Trucks and guns had already been brought ashore, and drivers and gun crews had claimed them as they hit the beach and immediately drove inland a quarter mile or so.

The beach was getting piled high with ammo, food and medical supplies at such a rapid pace we had difficulty keeping up with arrivals. The beach had to be cleared by sundown, and the vessels that brought us well on their way.

We worked like beavers and by sunset the beach was barren and benign appearing. The vessels had weighed anchor and were out of sight, and we had settled down to a long night's vigil. The guard was posted, we put blankets on the ground and prepared for the night and whatever it might bring. Then it started--the rumour mill.

The Jap fleet, so rumour had it, was 25 miles off shore and preparing to shell the area. Frantically we dug fox holes, submerged ourselves and waited. We waited all night but the only thing attacking us were persistent mosquitoes. They buzzed and stung and buzzed and stung. And we slapped and cursed. Dawn came and no Jap Fleet. Some of us broke out our "C" rations. I consumed half a can of beef and gravy that wasn't bad if you like liquid glue (the thin variety). Getting into the can was a problem as I had lost my can opener, however, an accommodating infantry man loaned me his bayonet.

All of a sudden a familiar aroma filled the air--COFFEE!!! I got out my cup and followed my nose to the Battery kitchen. And there it was. A big vat of the most beautiful coffee ever to grace the air with its incense.

We didn't say much. Just stood around enjoying the coffee and waiting for someone to give us word as to our destination. The gun crews had been up since before dawn and were ready to move out. Guns were hitched to the trucks and ready to roll, and the ammunition was loaded on its carriers. We stood about and waited, nervously

smoking, and silent. It was quiet--dead quiet. The Japs were somewhere in the jungle. We knew it and felt their presence.

Lt. Bittenbender was coming toward us. He was in charge of our gun crew. He was from Massachusetts and New Hampshire and was all business. "Mount up", he said, "We're moving out."

He climbed into the cab of the lead truck of Battery "D"; the driver climbed in the other side and started the engine. The rest of us clambered aboard and we were off.

We headed down a dirt road at a good clip. I say "down" because I didn't know in which direction we were headed. My nerves were so taut at this point, I had forgotten that the sun rose in the east.

We continued down the road four or five miles and then veered left into the jungle leaving the road behind. Though we had slowed to a snail's pace, we kept on for about a half hour going through increasingly heavy underbrush and beneath coconut palms when we suddenly came to a clearing at the bottom of a hill and stopped. "All out," came the order. We jumped from the trucks.

The gunnery officers were already locating positions for their batteries and gun crews unhitching the 105 mm howitzers. Battery "D" found itself at the bottom of a steep incline, and at left angles to the incline was a straight drop of fifty yards or so. We put a 50 caliber machine gun at the top of the precipice and a guard at the top of the incline.

I remember this first gun position very well for several reasons. The hill was quite steep and grass covered, but the one thing which still stands out in my memory is the lone tree at the top. There it stood, like a lone sentry, overlooking the valley below.

Our guns were in position and ready for firing and as there was naught else to do, we dug fox holes and pitched shelter halves over them--and none too soon. For at that point, the heavens opened up. And did it rain!! Not only rain rain, but coconut rain along with it. Coconuts nestling in the palms of trees fifty feet up came down with a thud as the wind increased ripping them from their moorings. And the volume of water can be described only as a Niagara Falls--like a deluge. In less than ten minutes, we were a bit over ankle deep in water, and it was rising. Water poured down the hill adding to the flooding. Fox holes disappeared from view, and the Colonel sloshed about cautioning all and sundry to watch our step and not fall into the holes as we might drown, when suddenly he disappeared with a loud gurgle. A couple of men, who were nearby, quickly pulled him out. He was a sight!! A sad sack if we ever saw one. Bedraggled, and soaked from the top down, his first remark was, "See what I mean." Then thanking the two men he sloshed off to get into some dry clothing and doubtless find another hole to explore. The incident brought to mind one of my early training days when my parents visited me at Ft. Bragg. Ft. Bragg was essentially a training facility for artillery of all types, and was known officially as the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center to the Defense Department, and to those of us taking the course as The Fart Center(FARTC).

The day of their visit was Saturday and rainy, and true to form the army had us on a five mile training hike with full field packs. On our return about noon I saw my parents waiting outside the barracks. The rain had stopped, but not until we were soaked to the skin. Before dismissing us the First Sergeant ordered us to get into dry clothing.

Then we were free for the weekend. I hurried over to greet my parents and explained I would be with them as soon as I had changed. The words were no sooner out than my mother said, "Imagine letting you get soaked like this. I want to see your first sergeant."

I could see it was hopeless to explain that this was the army and we did things on command without question. And my father was no help. He just smiled as if to say, "It's up to you, my boy." So, off I trotted to the orderly room.

Sergeant Hanrahan was a twenty-five year career man as well as a World War I veteran. He was gruff, rough and trained us well, and had our interests at heart. He was not bashful about taking a brand new second lieutenant behind the orderly room, and out of earshot, or so he thought, proceed to tell the officer when and how he'd gone wrong. They had a high regard for him.

But, today he was wet as any of us and in a hurry to get into dry clothing. As he put it, "If an Irishman is going to get wet, it will not be with rain water."

He didn't look up as I entered the orderly room. "Yes Stix", he said, softly enough to make me think he knew what was coming. I mustered my courage, "Sergeant," I blurted out, "my mother would like to meet you."

With that he was on his feet, and looking me straight in the eye said loudly and distinctly, "Tell your mother I don't want to meet her, I have enough trouble already."

I muttered an "O.K." and left.

My parents were where I had left them at the foot of the barracks steps.

"Well," said my mother, starting toward the orderly room.

I delivered Sergeant Hanrahan's message verbatim. She looked at me in stunned disbelief. My father just stood there, a broad grin on his face.

Meanwhile, on Guadacanal the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun. It would soon be dark, and when night came it was as though someone had suddenly switched off the sun. There was no twilight.

All of us were a bit edgy this second night on the Island.

It was pitch black, and extremely quiet. In a word it was frightening. Every now and then you heard the call of parrots and other bird life. Occasionally the leaves rustled and the gravel would be stirred as the ever present land crabs moved about. Aside from these nocturnal sounds--nothing.

I lay at the bottom of my fox hole hardly moving a muscle, trying to get some sleep.

Suddenly there was a burst of fire from the machine gun entrenched at the top of the precipice and a voice frantically calling, "The Japs are here!! The Japs are here!!" And then pandemonium.

I grabbed my rifle, released the safety catch and pointed the gun straight up and just sat there. The first Jap who stuck his head over the top would lose it forthwith.

Meanwhile the Colonel was bellowing out, "Casey, where the hell are you?"

Came back the reply loud and clear from the opposite direction, "Over here!!" Jack Casey had a brother, Tom, and he responded simultaneously.

"Well, Jack, you just get over here," bellowed the Colonel, sounding for all the world like a mad bull.

"Yes, sir," and Captain Casey headed for the precipice, .45 in hand.

The poor guy on the machine gun was shaking like a leaf.

"I saw a Jap coming straight up!" he yelled excitedly.

"Well," said Jack, "if they aren't coming up now they'll be doing so shortly. So SHUT UP." There was no further disturbance from that quarter the rest of the night. But, it was different behind us where a 155 MM Howitzer Battalion, United States Marines were located. At precisely midnight they let go with one round from each of twelve guns simultaneously. The earth shook; my teeth chattered, and at that very moment all sleep was gone for that night. I was sure that barrage presaged a full scale Jap attack. But nothing happened. No more artillery fire. Nothing. Next morning MacInnes walked by my fox hole about five thirty and softly called out, "Stix."

"Yes," I replied. To which he answered, "Shut up." The tension was broken.

We had breakfast a few at a time. It consisted of dehydrated eggs and coffee, and if we were still hungry we would disappear from view and open a can of "C" ration. That was frowned on as they were meant for emergencies only.

And, oh yes. The atabrine. Our beloved atabrine. It was a small yellow pill you were supposed to take once a day to ward off malaria. Eventually, you turned the color of the pill. It exasperated Matusz who one day asked me to look at him closely then tell him if he resembled the enemy. At that point I turned yellow and refused to answer.

About this time, the first sergeant assembled the battery.

"Listen carefully," he said. And we listened intently as we knew Mike DiPietro meant it. He held up a rectangular object about four inches long, and an inch and half to two inches high at its widest point.

"This is known as type "D" ration. It is a highly concentrated form of energy food in chocolate form and marked off into three equal pieces to be taken one piece for breakfast; one piece for lunch; and one piece for supper. It may be eaten as is but is better diluted in hot water. Never eat the entire bar at once. You'll get so sick you'll wish you'd never heard of it. And lastly, this is only to be eaten as a last resort after all other rations are unavailable to you. Any questions? Alright, you fellows file down by the mess tent and the mess sergeant will give you each one bar. Dismiss."

Fortunately, we got our "D" Ration that afternoon for that night during an air raid the Japs made a direct hit on the Supply Tent and the "D" rations ended up with the "C" rations scattered all over Guadalcanal.

The next morning some of us wandered over to look at the mess created last night--and it was a mess. Fortunately no one was hurt. About that time someone hollered "sniper" and everyone ran for cover. The Colonel came over to a point at the foot of the incline and inquired who had sounded the alarm. Sergeant Ratus said he had spotted a Jap in a tree at the top of the hill. We cautiously poked our heads up from our various holes, but all we could see were palm leaves waving in the breeze. No Jap. Folmer suggested we fire one round at the tree and see if it brought a response. This idea was quickly scotched.

Then Captain Jack Casey said he'd settle the matter, and with that ran up the slope taking cover behind palm trees and logs as he went along. When he reached the top he gave us the all clear signal. No Jap. A few weeks later Sergeant Ratus was made a 2nd Lieutenant and transferred to another outfit.

The battle of Bloody Ridge was history by the time we moved into position along that hard fought for stretch of real estate. The Marines had finally slaughtered the Japs in a night of climactic fighting. We set up the Command Post and Fire Direction Center and waited. In fact, it was quiet for several days. Then one morning around eleven o'clock small arms fire suddenly resounded around us. I was alone in the CP at the time and couldn't leave to look around as the field phone would have been unattended. So, all I could do was sit and wait. Nervously. The firing grew in intensity, and though nothing appeared to be coming my way at the moment, I started digging a fox hole in the middle of the tent. I was taking no chances.

Suddenly the phone started to ring. 'Till that moment, I had been concentrating on digging, so the phone scared the hell out of me. I answered it with the Battalion code name and a voice at the other end told me there appeared to be an unusual amount of firing around my position and would I step outside, see what was going on, and report back. The voice gave some code name I was unfamiliar with. My response was instantaneous and to the effect that only mad dogs and Englishmen would step out into that mess, and besides, I was alone in a CP and in charge of the phone. The line went dead and I continued digging.

About fifteen minutes went by and the Colonel appeared. He had a funny expression on his face; allowed as I was not very diplomatic as that was no way to speak to a General. And that's the last I heard of the incident. The Colonel, however, must have been roundly chewed out for leaving the CP with only one man on duty. Later on, I learned that a Japanese patrol had infiltrated to within a mile of our position and a platoon from the 132nd Infantry had sighted and ambushed them killing the entire bunch. Two 132nd men had been wounded.

That's all that happened for several days. Boredom was setting in. I got in a couple of chess games with Harry Bloch; caught up on my sleep and, with the rest of the Battery, speculated on what would happen next. It's a cinch we aren't going to sit idly indefinitely. There was something afoot. Though we weren't privy to military strategy our intuition told us we would be active again in another few days. Then the Colonel was called to Division Headquarters. Something big was in the offing. So big, the General was going to confide in our Colonel. Then it came out. We were to participate in taking Mt. Austen. This action was to be a combined effort of the Marines, Army, Navy and Air Force.

Our job was lay down artillery fire saturating the area assigned us. We were ready. Ammunition which had accumulated for weeks surfaced. Gun crews lined up their howitzers to conform to the first coordinates. That night all was in readiness.

The next morning was bright and cloudless; a perfect day for the Air Force. We noticed activity at Henderson Field had stepped up and bombers were taking off and heading directly toward Mt. Austen with bomb bays open. They were flying very low not trying to gain

altitude. Well above them P-38's formed a protective umbrella. As the bombers reached their target, we could plainly see large cylindrical objects falling from the bomb bays. There was a ten second delay then a series of loud thuds as they hit, and a few moments later it seemed as if the entire Island would tear itself asunder as the ground shook. Those bombers had dropped depth charges supplied by the Navy. When we thought about it, the reason for the use of depth charges was simple. The H. E. would explode in the air just before touching the earth, and the palm trees and logs would absorb most of the effect. Delayed action fuses would cause the shell to explode after penetrating the earth, and the full force of the shell would have been wasted. But depth charges could be timed to explode on the surface and the tremendous concussion would kill all personnel for yards from the center of the explosion. And that is just what happened.

The air force laced both slopes and the top of Mt. Austen with depth charges, and the resulting concussion did the rest.

Then it was our turn. We opened fire as a battalion twelve 105 MM howitzers systematically throwing shells into designated areas. The firing lasted well over an hour. We blew out two guns in the process one in "C" Battery and one in "A" Battery, but we had been accurate and effective with our fire. Some Marines, and men from the 132nd Infantry, whom we saw a couple of days later, told us the combination of depth charges and artillery fire had been devastating. That Japs caught above ground by the depth charges died without a visible mark on their bodies killed by the concussion. Those below the surface, in fox holes, were killed by artillery fire. The remaining forces were routed by the Infantry and Marines. With the success of Mt.

Austen under our belts we proceeded to move forward. We crossed the Matanakau, and a couple of miles beyond dispersed the Battalion on either side of the road, put our guns in position and set up a Fire Direction Center.

All of this was done with much eclat as we were veterans, or so we thought. However, the most irritating events had yet to happen. One in particular would try our dispositions.

"Washing Machine Charlie" was that irritant. "Washing Machine Charlie" was a twin engine Mitsubishi bomber that would appear over Guadalcanal about ten o'clock each night and circle around with engines out of sync. so they sounded just like a washing machine. This served to keep us awake. Once in a great while he'd let go a bomb, but mostly he was there to harass us. Every now and then the anti-aircraft batteries would pick him up with searchlights and there would be furious anti-aircraft activity. When the bursts came too close for comfort "Washing Machine Charlie" would simply go into a power dive and blast away at a searchlight with his machine guns. If the searchlight operator was not fast enough in turning out his light, it sometimes got destroyed. All the while we would be crouching in fox holes. The damage from bombs was negligible, but we were in greater danger from shell fragments from our own anti-aircraft fire. The volume of fire was terrific, and these shells burst up to ten thousand feet in the air and you could hear a whistle or rush of air as fragments approached the ground. And the racket as they sliced through trees and finally hit with a thud. One night an extra large fragment about three jagged feet long and eighteen inches in width cut through the mess tent taking with it the battery stove. We found pieces of the stove the next morning, and the shell fragment in a brook

a half mile away. The Battery Cook mournfully surveyed his domain. All he could say, and continually was, "God Damn." Maybe the incident was trying to tell him something. Joe Combs suggested he hit the Colonel for a Section Eight now that what we already knew about his cooking had finally gotten around. The anti-aircraft technology improved rapidly when someone at home suddenly found out what was going on at Guadalcanal, and we received the first Radar Fire Control Unit in the Pacific. It consisted of four 90 MM anti-aircraft guns wired to the radar direction finder. This fire direction director was faster than George Lloyd in tracking then fixing on its target. Once it locked on the target it was all over. And that's what happened to "Washing Machine Charlie". It took just four shots and he was no more. Then there was "Pistol Pete." "Pistol Pete" was a piece of Japanese field artillery positioned in a cave near the top of one of the mountains. Each day precisely at noon "Pistol Pete" would be rolled out of the cave into firing stance and let go one round. Then he was rapidly pulled into the cave. All this would have posed only normal problems, but the fact that his daily shot was aimed at our Fire Direction Center developed a certain paranoia among its personnel, and Colonel Moffet in particular. So, we proceeded to plan the elimination of this nuisance.

Captain Jack Casey, Sergeant George Lloyd and Jack Folmer attacked the problem with zest. Maps and overlays surfaced and forward observers were called in. The distance from the Battalion to the cave housing "Pistol Pete", together with the altitude of his firing position, were calculated. The next day we observed him rolling the gun from the cave into firing position, and determined with a stop watch that it took him 120 seconds to accomplish this. After firing,

it took 90 seconds to roll him into the cave. It was then determined to hit him as he rolled out and before he had a chance to get off his single shot. Then the wind velocity and direction were calculated, and everything prepared for noon the next day. The only thing open to any uncertainty was wind direction and velocity. With any luck, it would remain very close to our calculations.

At eleven thirty the next morning, the battalion was ready. All 12 guns were loaded zeroed in on the cave from whence "Pistol Pete" would emanate. At precisely 11:58, Captain Casey gave the command, "Battalion - One Round - At My Command - FIRE." There was a thunderous roar as twelve 105 MM Howitzers fired in unison. One minute later Captain Casey turned from the phone and confirmed. "We got him. He walked right into it." According to our forward observer there wasn't anything distinguishable left of "Pistol Pete" or his gun crew. All 12 shells landed on target simultaneously and he and his crew just disapperaed from the face of the earth. We were on the move now in order to keep up with the retreating Japanese. We crossed the Tenaru and the Lunga and found ourselves taking up a position on the shore road. The only road extending the entire length of the Island. And it was busy. Traffic was heavy with trucks loaded with ammunition as well as with infantry advancing to forward positions.

Our guns were set up in firing position on the west side of the road. It wasn't easy placing them as the area as pock-marked with holes, large and small, sustained through naval and artillery shelling, and air force bombardment. Until that moment, we had not realized the impact of our artillery on the enemy. He must have suffered extensive casualties.

In an hour or so all four batteries had their guns in position; a fire direction center established and a message center set up at the side of the side of the road where it would be seen. We were well ahead of the wire section which was responsible for communications, and the message center was a temporary substitute. It was equipped with a walkie talkie, and two runners were on duty should radio communication prove impractical for any reason.

There was a lull in activity so I strolled toward the message center to have a word with whoever had charge. The Division mail truck and I arrived simultaneously. It had quite a load as we hadn't had any mail in two weeks. Sergeant Davis opened a sack, upended it, and papers, parcels and letters appeared in profusion. We couldn't hold a mail call in the middle of the road which was devoid of any kind of cover, so the Sergeant sent a message to each Battery to send a man who knew the roster to pick up the mail. I was about to return to the Fire Direction Center when Sergeant Davis called me, "Might as well take this," he said, handing me a large parcel. I was mystified. On removing what turned out to be the outer wrapper, a large cookie tin appeared with a card taped to it. It was from the Mercers. The Australian family who'd been so hospitable. And it was a huge chocolate cake. "Got a bayonet?" I asked Sergeant Davis. His eyes were as big as saucers as he pulled a bayonet from its sheath and handed it to me. I cut a piece, handed it to him, and after wiping off the bayonet headed for Headquarters Battery.

It was noon and a cloudless day. The sun seemed unusually bright as I started along the road my rifle slung over my right shoulder, my helmet in my left hand and the chocolate cake in my right. Something caused me to look up and there, not fifty feet off the ground,

and perhaps three hundred yards ahead of me and coming in my direction were two Jap bombers. For an instant I froze in amazement. Then I reacted. I slapped the cake on my head, threw my helmet off to the left and dove into a shell hole alongside the road. As the planes passed over me the bomb bays swung open with an audible click and out tumbled anti-personnel bombs. At the same time waist gunners on both planes were busy with their machine guns and dust spurted up as bullets hit all around the area. The bombs all came down together in an uninhabited area, and that was that. It was all over in a minute or less. To this day, I can see that wiry shrimp of a Jap waist gunner, wearing an oxygen mask and goggles, sending bulle down the road. As I stood up, I felt a gooey substance running down my face. Slowly I put my hand to my cheek. I was covered with chocolate. It tasted real good.

I climbed out of the hole and retrieved my helmet. The Colonel was talking to Sergeant Howard who was on the 50 caliber machine gun, "Why didn't you fire at them," he asked.

Sergeant Howard looked a bit sheepish, "They took me by surprise. I was cleaning it and had the firing pin out. When I saw them I put it in backwards." The Colonel said nothing, just turned away. From that moment we had aircraft lookouts going around the clock.

The enemy had completely surprised us by coming in behind the mountains at sea level below our Radar. On reaching the mountains they did a rapid climb to an altitude just high enough to clear them then dropped to practically ground level and proceeded toward our position using the road as a reference point. They were through their mission and on the way home before our fighters were off the ground.

The next morning the Battalion moved up another mile or so. No sooner had we established our Battery's firing position, a message arrived from Division Headquarters to send someone to pick up new artillery overlays and maps. We had advanced beyond the point where the maps we had were useful.

I was elected to get the new material; the Colonel loaned me his Jeep, and I was off. As I retraced our tracks, I suddenly realized we had covered quite a bit of territory in a relatively short time. We had crossed three rivers--The Matanakau--The Lunga--The Tenaru. We had fired several thousand rounds killing I don't know how many of the enemy.

I passed elements of the 132nd Infantry, some Marine anti-aircraft batteries along the edge of the road on the ocean side, and finally arrived at the Americal Division Command Post. I parked and locked the Jeep and walked in. A Major was sitting at a desk near the entrance I saluted. "Overlays for the 247th FA BN", I said. He looked at me a moment, then asked, "Who's your Battalion Exec?"

"Major Charles Watrous," I replied.

"Where's he from?" the question rapidly followed my answer to the first question.

"New Haven, Connecticut." I replied.

Satisfied, the Major handed me an 11" x 14" envelope. "Good luck, son", he said, "and tell your Colonel to phone me when these arrive."

I saluted, "Thank you, sir" and headed for my jeep.

As I approached the vehicle an M. P. stopped me, "That's the General's parking space."

I looked at him, "Gonna give me a ticket?" I said with a supercilious grin.

"You're from the 247th, aren't you?" He ignored my little witticism. "You guys sure know how to shoot. We can count on you every time." He turned and walked off.

I put the envelope containing the overlays underneath the seat cushion and got in. I put my rifle in a convenient place between the two front seats where I could get at it in a hurry, then started the engine. As I pulled out on the road and headed back toward the 247th, something told me to look back. The M. P. was at the entrance to the C. P. watching me. I waved.

I figured the drive would take about an hour, and settled down to what I thought would be a routine ride.

The road was wide enough for one vehicle, and if two should meet it was inevitable that one pull over to the shoulder and stop until the other had passed. And so it came to pass that a few minutes later a great big Marine Corps truck, 6 x 6, came barreling toward me. There was a 25 mile per hour speed limit on that road. That limit was arbitrarily arrived at to conserve vehicles. That is, wreck or damage as few as possible. Replacements had a long way to travel. As the truck got closer, I could see from the way he clung to the center of the road he wasn't going to give an inch. He was traveling 50 miles per hour at least, and there wasn't time to do anything else, I pulled off to the right and came to rest with the front end of the jeep against a nice hard palm tree. It had the resiliency of steel plate. The truck went right on by the driver looking straight ahead and not honoring me with even a glance. I had a few choice words for him, then turned to my jeep. It had a bloody nose.

Palm tree trunks are very bad things for a motor vehicle to come in contact with. The bumper and radiator had been caved in--somewhat--and the question was--would it run. There was no evidence of a radiator leak so, with a prayer and tender loving care, I could get it back to the outfit. I reached for the ignition key, gave it a turn, and she broke into a deep throated healthy roar. I breathed a temporary sigh of relief. I would not have to walk. I backed out onto the road and continued my journey. I drove on for a while and suddenly realized I had not passed a single soul on foot or in a vehicle, and the landscape even appeared strange to me. I should have reached the 247th by now. I was in a quandry when suddenly I came upon a lone G.I. walking up the road. I stopped and asked, "Seen the 247th?"

"Yes", he said, "a couple of miles back. They were moving into a new position in the jungle."

"Thanks," I said, "who are you?"

"I'm with the 132nd "B" Company. I'm the point."

What he meant was, he was the lead man for the platoon. No one was in front of him but the enemy.

I swallowed hard, thanked him, turned the Jeep around and started out full speed for a trail off into the jungle a couple of miles back. Fortunately a truck from "C" Battery turned into the jungle and I followed it ending up at the Battalion C.P. with the overlays and a badly bent jeep. As I handed the Colonel the overlays, I told him what had happened. His answer was not to worry about it as there was a shipment of material landing and he was scheduled for a new vehicle. Captain Tom Casey of "C" Battery

had been after him for a new one, and he'd take care of it. He told me to park the jeep with its rear end to the road and its front end up against palm log next to the dugout. When that was done he picked up the phone. "Casey," he said "you still want that Jeep? O.K., come and get it." The Colonel put down the phone, "He'll be here in ten minutes."

Sure enough, within eight minutes, Captain Casey drove up to the C.P., parked the jeep and strode in.

"Hello, Casey," said the Colonel. "Got the keys for your present vehicle?" Casey handed them over.

"Here you are," said the Colonel. "It's the one with its rear to the road. All you have to do is sign for it." Casey scribbled his name on the paper, and proudly and happily strode over to his newly acquired property, started the motor and backing out to the road, headed for "C" Battery.

Five minutes after he left the Colonel's new Jeep arrived. Ten minutes after that Captain Casey was on the phone expressing his indignation over having received a damaged Jeep. How could the Army do such a thing to him?

We were well on our way now. It was apparent to all of us we had the Japs on the run. Every night small vessels appeared off shore if they could get through our Naval and air attacks, and evacuate small numbers of enemy troops. One night the Marines caught a company of Japanese infantry just after they had boarded launches and were heading for their ships. The resultant rifle and machine gun fire poured on by the Marines was so effective not one launch made it, and the next morning the shore was Japanese dead bobbing about with the tide.

A day or two later the Colonel hastily got on the phone with Captain Casey of "C" Battery and told him to prepare to move out immediately. Then the Colonel got his equipment together, climbed into a Jeep and drove off. He left the crew in the C.P. gaping at each other in wonderment. What was up? We tried "C" Battery. The line was dead. All we knew we learned from a passing infantryman from the 132nd. He had seen the Colonel drive up to "C" Battery and then, without stopping, they drove off in the direction of Cape Esperance.

Two hours later we were still speculating on the meaning of the move when a Jeep stopped at the C.P. and General Seebree strode in. He hastily consulted our maps, asked how long ago "C" Battery had departed, and took off. We could only figure that "C" Battery had taken up a firing position behind enemy lines to cut off his retreat. Ultimately we were proven right.

A week later General Patch declared secure the island of Guadalcanal. The 247th Field Artillery Battalion had fired 14,000 rounds of 105 MM Howitzer ammunition with telling effect, and had made a real contribution toward an ultimate success on Guadalcanal. 14,000 Japanese had been killed, captured or evacuated.

Now we had orders to leave the Island for rest and recreation and to that end we packed up and a couple of nights later assembled on the beach. The same beach we landed on five months before. Off shore we could discern ships unloading our replacements. All was quiet. There was no conversation.

At dawn we started to board the launches, wading out in the surf so they would not become grounded. As we neared the vessel which was to take us from this Island, we saw the combat nets stretched down the side. We'd have to climb. Our cartridge belts were unbuckled, and rifles slung over one shoulder preparatory to the ascent. Then we were on the way up. Slowly--very slowly. The months of exposure to extreme heat, mosquitoes, sparse diet and malaria had taken their toll.

The load was heavy, and suddenly the rifle hurtled toward the ocean followed by my full field pack as I neared the top. The last five feet, two sailors leaned over the rail and seized my arms. They hoisted me to the deck and gently set me down. All 118 pounds of me. That's all there was left of the 161 pounds I weighed on arrival at Guadalcanal.

A ship's officer came over, "You alright, son?" he asked.

I got up. "I'm find, sir. Thank you." He walked away.

The ship was starting to move now, and at the same time a "Condition Red" sounded. Unbelievable, I thought. A sendoff by the Japs. I could see planes taking off from Henderson Field. And following their line of flight saw 20 Japanese bombers coming our way. They were headed for the transports. They were intercepted. They never reached their targets.