

Bobbie Schwendiman

# Lest We Forget

by Don Farrell

*Historic photos provided by Micronesian Area Research Center.*

I shall never forget the expression on my father's face when I told him I was moving my family to Guam. It was an unspoken statement on his part. Over thirty years had passed since the end of World War II; still the word Guam seemed to strike deep into his long silenced memories.

There was a momentary pause in our father-son conversation. His eyes took on a lost-in-time look as his mind conjured up vivid images of Pearl Harbor and the string of early American defeats in December of '41; Wake Island (Send us more Japs!), Bataan, Guam, Corregidor. His only image of Guam was the bombed out rock that appeared in every post-war history book.

Three years passed before I saw

that look again, on another face. One bright, warm morning in 1980 I sat on Asan Point, Guam. A crisp breeze blew in from the east, whipping small whitecaps across the bay. Construction trucks blared, buses full of Japanese tourists unloaded and a constant stream of passenger vehicles raced along Marine Drive, unaware of my companion and me, sitting near the water. A 747 roared into its glide pattern for Guam International Airport. Skin divers made their way into the water for a morning's adventure beneath the great blue carpet.

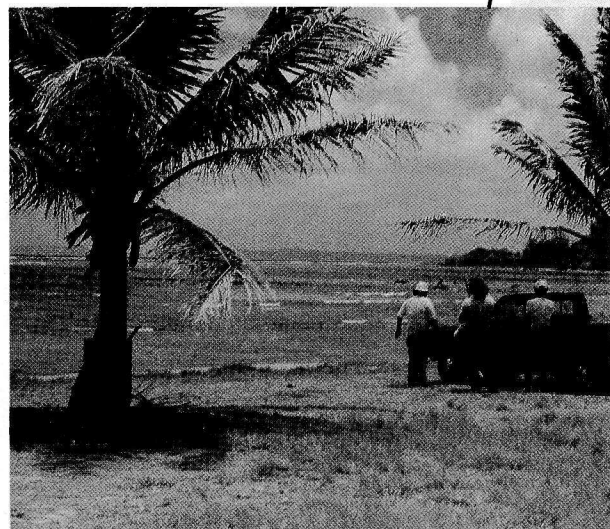
One thousand yards to the north, Adelup Point jutted seaward. Children played on the schoolyard atop the point. Fishermen walked the reef, throwing their ancient

nets. More and more families began to set up their Saturday beach fiestas.

The pages of my note pad ruffled in the breeze, making my writing illegible as I listened to Jack Eddy, U.S.M.C., Ret. Seldom does one hear a firsthand account of a forty year-old war. Even then, the stories usually come from someone who was behind the lines or an avid newspaper reader who imagined himself there. Rarely does one get to speak to a Marine, a platoon leader, a First Lieutenant who made beachhead landings on Bougainville, Guam and Iwo Jima — and lived to tell about it.

Jack and I sat on the cold coral boulders at the tip of Asan Point. A lone flagpole, without flag, coldly saluted the American Marines who

*Where amphibious tractors once lumbered onto the beach, today fishermen in pickups watch the tide.*



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died there almost thirty-six years ago.

Jack sipped a beer and pointed as he described the battle scene. His body was still taut, despite its sixty years. His hair was slightly grey, but still curly and lively in the damp breeze. His eyes may have lost some of their sight, but he still enjoyed perfect vision. He could describe the battle in detail. His voice grew animated as he remembered friends and individual actions — an ironic statement just before a man died, a particularly courageous Japanese, a moment of sheer terror.

"This is where we were supposed to land," he began, "but the fire was murderous. Can you see all those caves and cubby holes? There was a machine gun behind every one. The amphibious tractors

would drive across the reef right up to here, where we are sitting. Then the Marines would climb out and attack, face on."

A chill ran up my back as I envisioned dead men floating in bloody water at my feet, broken bodies on the beach and war-crazed soldiers rushing into bullets they would never see.

"The Japanese must have been scared to death," I said, "watching hundreds of ships, disembarking thousands of Marines in never-ending waves. Even in their caves with their moment's glory of cutting down the first Marines on the beach, they must have known that they were going to die."

Eddy studied my eyes, then looked out to sea and said quietly, "Don't you think that every Marine

who left those ships out there knew that HE was going to die?"

The stage onto which these men ran had actually been set years before. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, in August 1938, had decided that it would be economically unfeasible to fortify Guam against foreign invasion. So, rather than make a futile attempt at defense, Guam was forfeited to the Japanese.

During the next two and a half years, America built a war machine capable of fighting its way back to the Mariana islands stretching from Saipan to Guam. "Hell is upon us!" wired the Commander of the Imperial Forces in the Marianas when he stood on Saipan's shores and saw the resurrected ships of Pearl Harbor. That island, as well as Tinian, were taken from the Japanese in

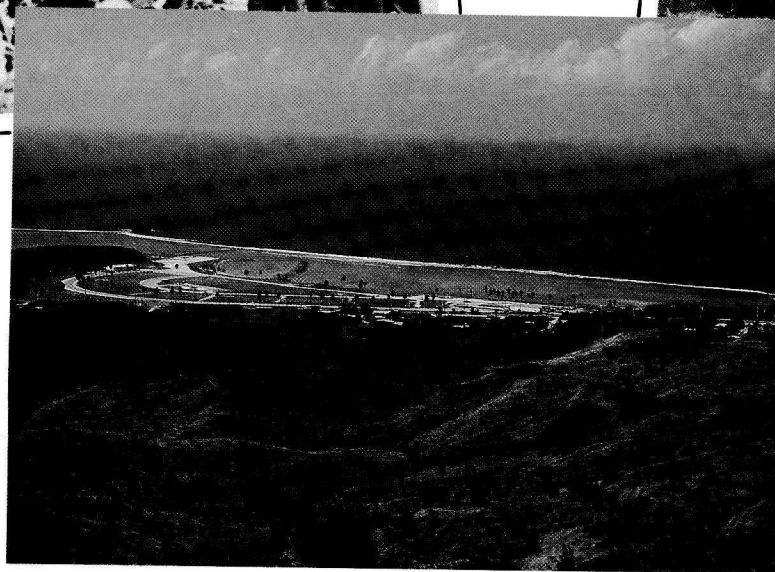


Bill King



*Devil's Horns was used as a barracks camp after World War II, as a staging area for Operation New Life after the Vietnam war, and is today the proposed site for a recreational park.*

Ruth Ann Becker



June 1944 by Admiral Nimitz.

In July Nimitz decimated the Imperial Navy in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, later to be known as the Marianas Turkey Shoot. This classic sea battle, between aircraft carriers that never saw each other, gave the U.S. Navy unchallenged control of the Pacific.

Having secured the safety of his troopships, Nimitz brought his fleet of firebreathing battleships, cruisers, destroyers and aircraft carriers to Guam. More than 560 warships laid siege to the island, and more than one hundred thousand men participated in launching 37,000 Marines and 18,000 Army personnel onto Guam's beaches.

Nimitz' adversary, General Takashima, watched the whole game plan unfold before his eyes

and could predict the outcome. For two weeks the American Navy had wreaked havoc on his coastal defenses with no response from the Japanese Navy or Air Force. Logic told him that there was no Japanese Navy or Air Force, and that the island would inevitably be lost.

But Takashima was a Shinto, honor-bound to defend his position to the death, and duty-bound to do it well.

The vast American armada left no illusions about the relative strengths of the two warring factions. But the Japanese commanded the strategic high ground. They were 20,000 strong with veteran troops which had plenty of ammunition and a will to win, if not to live.

Takashima knew he couldn't

prevent the Americans from landing, but he could deter them from climbing the hills. For the next five days, that would be the key to his defense of Guam, as he trained his forces' sights on every gully, ditch, mound and hole that could provide refuge to the invading troops.

Enter 37,000 Marines, with Jack Eddy's platoon among the first.

"Invasion day was very similar to this," Jack said. "Bright, clear, the water was calm, calmer than this. I know because I remember I didn't get sick riding in the little amphibious tractors.

"We called this beach 'Devil's Horns' because of the two points, Adelup and Asan. As I said, we were supposed to land here on this point. But there was already a bat-



*Once powerful cannons and once secretive bunkers have surrendered to wildflowers and vines.*



Bobbie Schwendman

talion here, doing everything that could be done about the heavy artillery and machine gun emplacements on top. So they landed us over there by the river mouth, which wasn't much better." He tried to point with the missing index finger of his left hand — a lifetime reminder of Iwo Jima.

"The guys who were supposed to have taken Adelup Point had been pinned down, slaughtered, along the old sea wall there. So we landed in the middle, with both horns still firing down on us. I remember the noise, the unbelievable racket of 20,000 Marines shooting at 20,000 Japanese. You couldn't hear a word. And I remember the weapons platoon leader getting only three steps out of the am-trac before he was cut down."

As Jack and I walked along Asan Beach, I tried to imagine what it must have been like. The caves on Asan Point were almost invisible, but they were there. I let my mind create a machine gun in every one, a determined defender holding down the trigger, fighting for his life by trying like hell to kill me.

I looked up at the hills and tried to imagine thousands of Japanese watching the Marines land, directing fire onto the beach, defending their Guam from the insurgent Americans, and thinking about families in Japan. They knew that if Guam fell to the Marines, then the home of the "Rising Sun" would be directly threatened. Their parents, sisters and loved ones would come under the merciless bombardment

of the U.S. Air Force.

The Marines, on the other hand, realized that by taking Guam, the door would be open to the final defeat of Japan. A bayonet thrust could be made at the gut of the Empire.

My mind was jumbled with the feelings of war, while my eyes watched the actions of peace. I walked where thousands of men had died violent deaths in the throes of decisive battle, and watched children playing, young lovers arguing and parents indiscriminately throwing trash on blood-stained sands.

"This was our first fight," Jack said as we drove his Blazer through the war, along an old dirt road behind Asan Beach. "Just a couple of caves with a few Japanese who hid

through the first landing wave and then popped out to pick on us."

We crossed the old Nidual River bridge and began to wind our way up the river valley. "This is where we began our offensive," said Jack. "Our job was to get on top of this ridge and drive south towards Piti, taking enemy machine guns and covering the rest of the company, down there on the beach."

We came to a stop near a swimming pool, just below Nimitz Hill. We had already walked the beach towards Piti where Jack and his platoon helped take the old Piti Naval Yard and its submarine pens. Now we were at the crux of the battle for Guam, the battle of Fonte Plateau.

Jack didn't know it at the time, but the Japanese commander of ground forces had directed the defense of Guam not far from Jack's own position. With mounting dismay, General Takashima had watched the Marines land and advance. He now planned a counter attack that would slice through the



Ruth Ann Becker

*Old Camp Asan provides writer Don Farrell with a stage for imagining and ex-Marine Jack Eddy with a stage for reminiscing.*

American lines, cut off their supplies, isolate them from resupply and hopefully eliminate them. His path lay directly across that of Lieutenant Jack Eddy and his reinforced 2nd Platoon.

I watched Eddy walk across this battleground, mapping out the area and describing the scene. Others driving by on a Saturday afternoon may have seen a slightly grey-haired man in Levis, tennis shoes and a Banlon shirt; but I saw a twenty-three year old Marine officer with a carbine in one hand, directing fire with the other and personally leading his men.

Jack stopped and pointed, "This is where the attack on Fonte Plateau, now Nimitz Hill, began."

I looked up the battlefield in bewilderment. From where I stood, there were 300 yards of open ground that led up to a cliff. Atop that cliff sat ComNavMar (headquarters for Naval Forces Marianas), resting on what was Fonte Plateau two-score years ago when Eddy charged it.

A battalion of Marines had been lost getting to this point. 2nd Battalion, which included Eddy's platoon, was next to attempt taking the top of the hill.

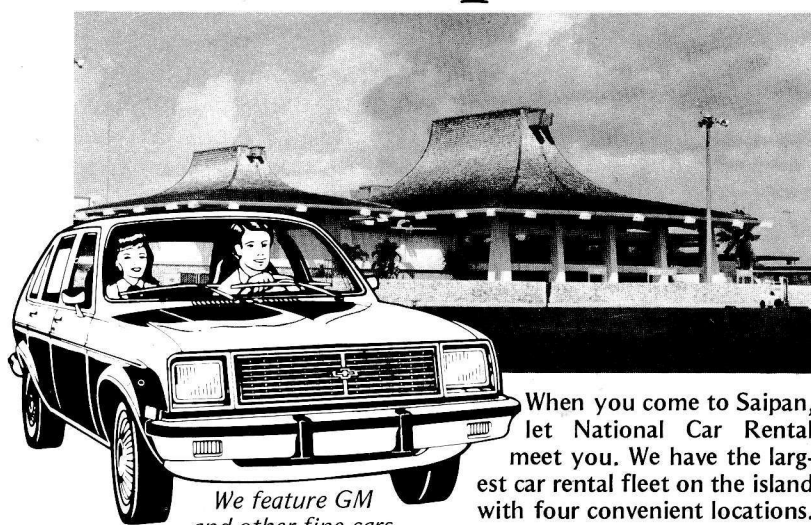
F Company had performed excellently during the first four days of battle, and Eddy's platoon had been the highlight of the company. Therefore it was only natural, in a Marine sort of way, that during the upcoming battle, his 2nd platoon would be given the point.

"It was really an honor to get named to the point," said Jack. "It was part of the esprit d'corps. The commander was telling us we were his best. And we felt proud to be given the chance to face the enemy's best and know that we could win, whatever the odds."

At 3:30 p.m. on July 25, 1944, 2nd Platoon of F Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment of the Fighting Third Division, watched white phosphorous smoke appear on the ridge before them.

(In a war before, a Marine had yelled, "Come on Marines. You want to live forever?")

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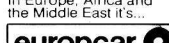
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Fifty-five men of the original sixty-six who had landed, dashed across open ground, up the cliff face and over the hill. Before the Japanese knew what was happening, "Fox II" was on the far ridge of the plateau, firing down into the camps of Japanese reinforcements.

Seven times that day and into the night, the Japanese counter-attacked. Seven times they were thrown back by 2nd Platoon of F Company. G Company, supposedly on their left, had been thrown off the hill. E Company, supposedly on their right, never made it up. 1st Platoon and 3rd Platoon, their officers dead, were decimated.

At 4:00 a.m., after a final tactical fifty-yard withdrawal, Jack crawled from foxhole to foxhole, counting his men and ammunition. "This is as far as we let them come," he said. Every man accepted his fate. They had evolved from civilian soldiers "dying among the living" to veteran Marines "living among the dead." Their names were already on the roles.

Then came the final assault. Jack called in Naval gunfire on his original position. The Japanese were trapped in the open. Throughout the rain of artillery, Jack's machine gunners poured out heavy fire.

In the early dawn hours of July 26th, seven men of 2nd Platoon were left alive; on their faces was the "two thousand yard stare" of men who are no longer within reality. Hundreds of Japanese littered the battleground, ironically arm in arm with their dead American enemies.

The battle for Fonte Plateau was decided and the outcome of the invasion of Guam determined.

Jack fought on-for fifteen more days until Guam was secured. A few months later, with new men and the Silver Star pinned on his hat, he landed on Iwo Jima, the final stepping stone to the invasion of Japan. He watched the immortal flag raising and drove on until he was finally shot in the chest while taking a machine gun. He finished the war in hospitals from Guam to

the Great Lakes. The fact that he lived, he credits to luck.

Thirty-three years passed before Jack saw Guam again. He had left the island when it was nothing more than a giant aircraft carrier, America's staging ground for the invasion of Japan. He felt some trepidation in 1976, at bringing his family to live where he had left nothing but death and destruction. Now Jack Eddy and I sat on the neatly cropped lawn of ComNav-Mar and watched four young Japanese tourists study a map splayed across the hood of their rented Toyota. I wondered if possibly their fathers had fought here during the war and they, like us, were looking for that special battleplace where their hero had taken his stand.

And I wondered if their father's face, like my father's, sometimes reflects that unspoken emotion about an island which now only exists in memory. For as time heals all wounds, time has also healed Guam. Where Jack Eddy slept in

a foxhole, there is a refinery. Where he earned the Silver Star in a night of horror are tennis courts and a plush officers' club. And where he directed machine gun ambushes, there is a beautiful international airport.

Rusting tanks stand guard in overgrown palm tree jungles, and bunkers and pillboxes now shelter coconut crabs. But of course, the war hasn't been forgotten. Thousands of Japanese tour groups visit the Marianas each year to view the sites where their countrymen were defeated. U.S. veterans can occasionally be seen, wives of many years in tow, searching Guam's beaches for a familiar landmark. The U.S. National Park Service is planning a War In The Pacific Park to provide interpretation of the action that occurred there.

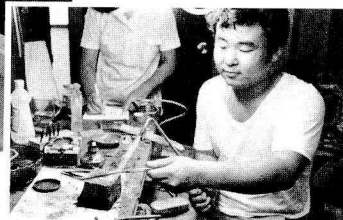
All this is fitting tribute to the memory of so costly a war. But perhaps the best tribute is that Guam has moved on, has become an island where, amidst all the memories, one can find peace. □



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