

Chapter 13

World War II

John entered the halls of the Golden Dome of Canisius College in the fall of 1940. At this juncture of his life he realized how uninformed and intellectually deficient his existence has been. As the freshman was probing for knowledge and seeking a comfortable place in the new world of Academia, Hitler's armies were on the marching conquering central and eastern Europe. ^{THE} United States was displaying its overt sympathies for the trampled nations and for the threatened British Isles. On September 16, 1940, the BurkeWadsworth Act was passed by Congress and President Roosevelt signed ~~it~~ ^{IT} which required all men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty five to register for the draft, and made them liable for one year of military training. Roosevelt was worried that the British were approaching financial exhaustion and could not much longer afford to pay cash for war materials that they desperately needed. In one of his fireside chats the president made it known to the world that, "Our country is going to be... the arsenal of democracy." Production



of military equipment of all kinds was set in motion, and over the stringent objections of the isolationists the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941 was passed. The law extended direct aid to Great Britain and the allied forces. In July of the same year, American troops occupied Iceland in order to prevent its occupation by Germany, and in August, Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill held their conference on a warship off the coast of Newfoundland establishing the ground work for the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations. As undeclared shooting war with Germany was now defacto in existence.

While most American eyes were focused on the European theater of war, Japan was pushing its conquests in the Far East. Japan's actions alarmed the United States, and President Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets. He also placed an embargo on the shipment of gasoline, machine tools, scrap iron and steel to the Empire of the Rising Sun. Japan in retaliation froze all American assets in areas under its control. United States countered in August of 1941 by sending a Lend-Lease mission to China. The Japanese government sent a "peace" mission to Washington in November of 1941 while secretly preparing an attack on Pearl Harbor should the peace negotiations break down. The Japanese emissaries demanded that the United States unfreeze Japanese assets, supply Japan with Petroleum and cease all aid to China. The negotiations were stymied, although an

exercise of futility at the peace table continued. Finally, in December the Japanese representatives were convinced that further negotiations were useless. To the Japanese, the United States clung to “impractical principals” and had failed to display in the slightest degree a spirit of conciliation. On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, Japanese airplanes roared down without warning striking the key citadel in the Pacific, Pearl Harbor. At the same day attacking Wake, Midway, Guam and the Philippines. President Roosevelt the following day, addressing Congress with his famous “a day which will live in infamy” asked the Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. The Senate declared war unanimously; the House, with one dissenting vote. Three days later, on December 11, 1941, Germany and Italy declared that a state of war with the United States existed, whereupon Congress declared war upon these two countries.

The majority of John’s childhood male friends within the year following the declaration of war were in the armed services or waiting orders from the draft board. The demands at the college were challenging, but the weekends he spent at home were not as they were prior to the turmoil caused by the war. He felt alone, left out, and he felt that he was missing the excitement, and that he was not part of the action which the news media was promulgating. The pondering issue to him

was, should he continue with schooling or to join the armed service? He registered for the draft and the future held him in a void of uncertainty.

As the war effort increased, the life styles on the home front was experiencing drastic changes. Rationing of food stuffs, gasoline and footwear was an established fact. Days after war was declared all sales of new motor vehicles were frozen. Auto dealerships were in tough financial straits. However, used cars became in great demand. As the war continued ~~the~~ used vehicles' prices skyrocketed. A seller with a set of wheels with a running engine dictated the price and nearly always got what he or she asked. Rubber goods became scarce. To purchase new tires, one had to receive approval from the rationing board. The prospective buyer had to present evidence and justification before written approval for purchase was granted.

Each family, after reporting to the ration board, was issued a ration book with stamps, sometimes referred to as coupons. The coupon - stamps were the size and shape resembling the US postage stamp. As purchases for staples were made, correspondingly a ration stamp was removed from the book. The vendor was responsible for collecting the stamps. The motto was "no ration stamp, no meat, sugar or whatever is rationed." Apartments and home rentals eventually fell under government control. Home owners were encouraged to salvage all metals for the war effort including disposable razor blades. ^{The} Red Cross expanded its facilities and

filled the void for needed hospital accouterments for the war front. Nylon stockings were a scarce commodity, the silky soft fabrics were prioritized for parachutes. Since mankind has been cursed with malfeasance of the original sin, the Black Marketeers were taking in illicit profits. The black market operated outside the realm of the rationing system. The price of sugar, chocolate, meats and other food stuffs sold five times or more the average price.

Car pooling became very popular, every auto owner strove to save and stretch their gasoline rations. In the last year of the war, counterfeit ration stamps appeared. A ten gallon gasoline bogus stamp could be had for twenty five or fifty cents.

“Victory gardens” were patriotic, practical and popular. Back yards, or wherever there was sufficient sun light and suitable soil, vegetables were grown. Bicycles regained their popularity and public transportation at rush hours was taxed to standing room only. Additional trains and trolleys were put into service. Usually on week end passes railways in the proximity of an armed service base had the railroad cars bursting with GIs.

Industries were short of manpower. Rural populace, most notably from the South moved North and to the Northeast filling in the labor shortage. In a few industrial centers, friction and a long seethed resentment erupted between the

established residents and the "new commers," particularly between the white and black workers. The animosity sometimes got out of hand and fights broke out, tantamount to riots and the militia was called out to restore order.

Men in the draft category who were engaged in ^{the} war effort were deferred from being called to the armed service. Some jobs or positions of employment, ~~as~~ for example, salesmen, were not deferred from the draft, consequently the more energetic salespersons evaded the draft by obtaining a second job in a defense plant. For the longest time, even after World War II had ended, a negative whispering tale was circulating in our city about a young man from a well to do, prominent family who evaded the draft by working on a farm picturing himself as an essential wheel in raising food stuffs for the war effort. The word was that he did not know the difference between a hoe and the flag pole. Years after the war he delved into politics winning local offices and eventually gaining a seat in the House of Representatives. The story of his draft dodging is lingering on among old timers. Another somewhat sinister whispering tale had to do with the personnel composition of the draft board. It was said that statistics indicated that most of the young men per capita that were drafted were of the Eastern and Southern European stock and the Anglo Saxons generally because of their so called war efforts were deferred from the draft. The gossiping whirlwind included one of the priests from the city

who raised serious questions and objections in the manner that the board selected and deferred young men from the armed services.

In the course of several months the area newspapers were reporting the sad news of the boys wounded, missing and dead due to enemy action. Emblematic symbols were surfacing in recognition to the sacrifices in the cause of the war efforts. Mothers who lost their sons were given a small pennant with a gold star on a blue field trimmed with white and red. A lapel pin with the five pointed gold star was the badge of the supreme sacrifice, a red star represented that a member of the family was in the armed service. The management and employees in the war effort industries were awarded the emblematic "E" lapel pins for their contribution in increasing production of war materials. The country was at full employment and some industries experienced a shortage of laborers and skilled workers.

Municipalities established recreational centers for servicemen and service women who were on leave from duty. Women volunteered their services in the armed services in a non combative capacity. The "USO" signs or pennants on buildings were the welcome mats for all armed service personnel. The United Service Organization provided coffee, doughnuts, and refreshment, often accompanied with music and a dance floor. ^{The} Hollywood Canteen attracted thousands of GIs and the stars of the silver screen made their appearance at the center as an

added attraction. Ogden, Utah with it's generous citizens put on a lavish spread at their railroad station for the GIs who were criss crossing the country. The men and women in uniforms were treated with respect and gratitude by the generous American public.

John joined the US Marine Corps at the end of his sophomore year, however he was not called to active duty for several months. During the summer vacation while awaiting his call for duty he was employed by the Dunlop Corporation. Entering his third year in college he received his orders. The seven weeks of boot camp training was fulfilled at the San Diego base. Following boot camp John volunteered for the paratroop school. He was assigned to the Fourth Battalion at camp Gillespie, California. In the midst of the training the Marine Corps paratroops program was discontinued, and his unit was assigned to the Camp Pendleton Marine base as the nucleus of the Fifth Marine Division.

Prior to the Fifth Marine Departure for combat in the Pacific theater, John was granted a furlough. Arriving home, it was not surprising to find that very few of his buddies were on the home front. His on again, off again high school romance was off again. The taverns on Oliver Street lost their usual body count and jollity. Not anticipating the unexpected, Eugene, his classmate from parochial school was discharged from the army. The two made up for lost time over several beers,

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talking, reminiscing of years never to be forgotten. Their home parish church was promoting the annual picnic and the duo, at the urging of Eugene, decided to make the best of the social affair. The picnic grounds were as usual on Center Avenue near the church and the school. Upon entering the grounds Eugene introduced John to two of his girl friends, Irene and Violet. The introduction happened by chance. The girls were at the entrance of the picnic grounds as the boys sauntered in; seemingly the girls had come to the grounds a few minutes before the boys. A brief conversation followed and the girls were politely excusing themselves from the company stating that they simply wanted to peek at the picnic. They were invited to a house party and they extended an invitation to the boys, hopefully to make up a foursome. Eugene, at the first ^{APPROPRIATE} ~~apropos~~ moment asked John whom would he favor to escort to the party. He hoped John would ask Irene, for he had his eye on Violet, and the good old friends were no longer. Several years later, John and Violet pledged to each other eternal love. Unknown to John, Eugene was very serious with his intentions toward Violet. He dated her a few times. He was courteous and showered her with attention and gave her a soldier's portrait of himself as a prelude of hopefully slipping her an engagement ring. But there was not any responsive chemistry from Violet.

All good things have an end, and it was inevitably true of John's brief sojourn at home. In less than ten days he was boarding the train, heading west to Camp Pendleton.

^{CARPS}
The Fifth Marine Division, following several months of advanced combat training at Camp Tarawa, Hawaii sailed for Iwo Jima as a segment of a 800 ship attack force. More than 60,00 Marines struck at the Japanese held eight square miles speck of an island in the Pacific defended by 22,000 troops. The primary reason this island was targeted because it had two airfields and a third was under construction. Japanese air interceptors were in position to strike at our bombers to and fro as attacks were launched against the Japanese mainland. This tiny island of volcanic origin covered with black cinder like sand is 760 miles almost due south from Tokyo. The enemy held island was a deadly thorn in the wings of the American airforce. The pork chop shaped island was extremely well fortified with concrete bunkers, honey combed with protective caves, entrenched artillery and pock marked with machine gun emplacements. Stiff resistance was anticipated from the fanatical foe, but the military experts spoke with confidence that the entire operation would be over in ten days and perhaps a few^{ADDITIONAL} days afterwards for mopping up, isolated die hard fanatics. The Japanese held out almost five weeks and our losses were greater than anticipated.

John was wounded shortly after landing on the beach in the first assault wave. Recovering aboard a hospital ship from a bullet wound which grazed his left eye and the bridge of his nose. If he had held his ~~head~~^{head} forward instead of eschewed to the right as he asked for more ammunition for his Browning (BAR), he would have lost both of his eyes and the bridge of his nose. The wounded Marine's hospital stay lasted a little over a week. As an ambulatory case with a scabby red eye, and a swollen bruised nose, he was asked by a Chaplain to render him a favor. John was one of six wounded Marines to participate as an honor guard in a funeral. A comrade in arms died of wounds aboard ship and he was about to be buried at sea. The ceremony was very brief and very sad. The Chaplain had read a verse or two from the bible, followed by a prayer over a corpse cocooned in a canvass bag lying on a stretcher lightly covered with an American flag. A thick rope with iron weights were tied to what appeared as legs to the departing Marine. Taps was played by the bugler and before the last note was sounded the stretcher was raised, tipped so the body ~~head first~~^{head first} would slide from under the colors over the ship's rail into the blue Pacific. Approximately eight to ten minutes had elapsed in the course of the burial. John had deep disconsolate and profound feelings, witnessing how cavalier and a matter of fact one's life can be to strangers, yet so dear to the loved one's in the distant home not knowing the slightest what had happened to their boy. Years later

as he attended his friends and family funerals, he experienced ~~the~~ repeated flash backs of the burial at sea. One funeral barely last^{ed}~~ing~~ a few minutes with^a minimum of love and care, and the others lasting almost a half day with ostentatious ceremony enhanced with sprays of flowers, wreaths and impressive eulogies. Death can play ironic, unfair, and vicious tricks on mankind.

The bridge of his nose had a weeping scab. His left eye was blood shot with the lower eye lid having a raw appearance as if it had been scrapped^{during}. The first few days his wounds were bandaged and patches were applied with oily base to promote healing from within. There were no apparent signs of infection. After the fourth or fifth day the bandages were removed allowing nature to take its course. John periodically ventured on the deck, observing the dust and smoke swirling at various places on the island. Battleships lobbed sixteen inch shells as observation planes were buzzing over the battle ground directing fire on the enemy positions.

It had been a week since he had been evacuated to the hospital ship when Tucker, a member of the second squad of the First platoon, spotted John at the mess hall. He had a clean bullet wound through the calf of his right leg. He got about without any apparent limp, and as always smiling without a care in the world. His presence broke the boredom of doing nothing, just waiting for the wounds to heal. The following morning as they lined up for breakfast, the public address system

announced with the familiar opening phrase: "^{Now hear} ~~now here~~ this." A launch was set to sail for the island and every morning hereafter. The announcement ended stating that any Marine desiring to rejoin his unit may leave the ship after receiving approval from a doctor. Tucker and John looked at each other and both nodded with a get go^o head motion delicately screening their trepidation with half hearted smiles. A brief conversation followed and both were on the same verse and chapter of going ashore. They were convinced that the battle should be just about over and they ~~liked~~^{wanted} to be in on the finale. Perhaps more aptly stated, they ~~were~~^{had been} brain washed that the battle was a ten day engagement, with a few days of aftermath mopping up of remnant enemy hold outs. Receiving doctor's clean bill of health, the two Marines were heading into an inferno which they believed was about to be extinguished, instead the deadly conflagration continued for almost a month with the loss of thousands of lives; the vast majority ~~was~~^{being} the enemy.

The landing craft heading for Iwo on D+9 with John and Tucker plus ten recovered Marines was like a pleasure trip ~~in~~ⁱⁿ comparison to the Dday landing. As the launch ~~was~~^{ed} bobbing over the waves lurching forward toward the island, in a flash ~~he~~^{John} recalled how nine days ago organized confusion reigned ~~among~~^{had} among the Marines readying themselves for combat, double checking their equipment, ~~F~~^Fostering a convincing pretense of not feeling the pangs of fear. The momentary retrospective

image placed him in the amphibious personnel carrier heading toward the enemy held fortress as the big guns of the several warships were firing huge shells over the first assault line of landing crafts. The ~~se~~wishing resonance of the huge unseen projectiles were distinctly audible as they were fired from the sixteen inch guns of the battleships. In the forward position of the first assault wave of the amphibious vehicles, were a dozen or more rocket launching boats, releasing hundreds of deadly self propelled rockets aimed at the beach head, softening the enemy held position as our planes were strafing the shore line. The beach head resembled a volcanic eruption, the dust and smoke reduced visibility and the immediate results were difficult to assess. One conclusion could be drawn that no human being or animal could survive this Armageddon. But to the contrary, the Japanese defenders were very much alive, inflicting deadly fire on the advancing forces.

The first assault wave did not receive any heavy fire, only small arms. The Japanese command held back their big guns, fearing a diversionary tactic, however, the subsequent waves received deadly mortar and artillery fire.

As the tracks of the amphibian made contact with the volcanic deposits of Iwo Jima, the men scrambled over the sides running forward in ankle deep cinder like sand. Shortly before the landing someone gave John a stick of chewing gum. In a daze, his mind clouded with fear and confusion, he unraveled the Wrigley and

instinctively started chewing it. Having scrambled over the side, he had a very difficult task of running up the slope of the shore line. Spotting a favorable place to set his Browning automatic rifle, he turned his head to the right shouting to Milton to bring extra magazines of ammunition. At that moment John was hit in the face, knocking him off his feet. He was blinded by the impact. To him it seemed as if he were hit by a bright flash. He felt no pain. The company B corpsman Corporal Cohen, a cocky, arrogant New York City Jew with a lot of guts and courage seeing that John was hit ran up to him, cursing at the enemy while applying first aid. He applied sulfa powder on ^{the}~~his~~ wound; gave him a shot of morphine and bandaging his head covering both eyes. Leaving John on his own, the corpsmen advanced into the deadly quagmire to administer first aid to fallen comrades where his brave soul was separated from his body by a snipers' bullet.

John blindly crawled and fortuitively slid into a shell hole which was deep enough to swallow a cabin. It must have been the morphine that made a precarious situation seemingly alight. His thoughts dictated that there was nothing to worry about. In his mind everything was copacetic. He had a warm, pleasant feeling, no pain and at some point in the shell hole he slid the bandage off his right eye. Scrutinizing the skyline and surroundings above him, his eye rested for a moment on an object on the crest of the shell hole. An ominous ball about 18 inches in diameter

with several three to four inch horns sticking out of it was precipitously perched on the crowning head of his earthly concaveous resting place. The deadly instrument was self evident, it was a floating marine mine which by unknown means rested on dry land instead of in water. The explosive mechanism was about ten to twelve feet above him. A stray bullet, a chance shrapnel from an exploding mortar shell could detonate the mine.

The half doped up and half blind Marine had to get out of the lethal cavity. The course volcanic sand gave way, not supporting John's body as he tried to extricate himself from a self imposed potential death cell. Crawling upward on all fours several times ^{met} with no success. ^{He} Repeating to himself many times, "please don't explode, don't explode." Panic was getting the best of him, when unexpectedly he heard a voice yelling to him, "Get the hell out of the hole, fast! Or you'll get blown up." He could not see well enough who was yelling. John replied that he needs help before he could complete his plea for assistance the Marine at the crest of the hole extended a long leather belt. It undoubtedly was the unravelled sling of his MI rifle. With the good Samaritan's aid he was out of immediate danger. The fellow Marine led John to a shallow deflated area safe from enemy observation and small arms fire, and after a few words of comfort the helpful colleague was gone. It might

have been a half hour more or less that the wounded warrior was found and escorted to a craft which took him to the hospital ship.

Ashore for the second time, on the black ash grimy beach where hundreds of combat vehicles and thousand of marines monopolized the sights and sounds of actions milling about in taxonomic confusion. After several unsuccessful attempts to learn the location of their units, John and Tucker finally received the exact location of their company and platoon from an artillery observer. The 27th regiment, 1st battalion, Company B was bivouacked between the second airfield and the partially constructed third airstrip. The two marines were amazed at the construction going about and the infrastructure progress. The bulldozers were plowing in shell holes, repairing the airstrips damaged by artillery action, roads were carved almost in every direction as the battle raged on less than a mile away. Many large military tents were erected as if they were permanent structures. The first airfield was reconstructed and planes were landing and taking off as often as bees from a hive. As the duo walked towards their unit they were startled by scenes which will live in their memories to their dying days. A large "lean to" tent was set up on the side of a newly bulldozed road. In perimidal design as if they were logs freshly cut from a virgin forest, rigirmortized Marines were stacked under the canvas roof. Their arms and legs were frozen in unnatural extensions. Some had

their eyes open, the others were closed and several had bloodied masks. John was frozen with shock and disbelief. Here were perhaps sixty demised images of God in a makeshift morgue awaiting quick ~~the~~ burials before the stench became more real and repulsive. It was learned after the battle was history, that their burials were expedited quickly in ^a humane manner and their resting places had individual recognition of honor designated by the cross or the Star of David. The ^{dead} Japanese ~~dead~~ defenders were bulldozed into broad deep trenches in large numbers with cursory markers stating 25, 50, or 100 Japanese buried here. John could not erase the deeply disturbing scenes of the dead marines and of the enemy as he and his fellow marine trudged on their way to rejoin the unit. The horrible scenes of mayhem and wanton destruction of lives, for the first time in his life, John gave weight, meaning and credence to the opening lines of Saint Francis of Assisi prayer:

Lord make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love

where there is injury, pardon

John in his opening year of his twenties was growing up fast. War was not only hell as bluntly stated by the Union General William T Sherman as his forces burned its way through the South, but also, to John, war was the ultimate ruthless overt exercise of greed.

Approaching the partially constructed airfield they passed through a series of over run~~ned~~ enemy trenches where a score of Japanese defenders committed mass Hari Kari rather than surrendering. Seemingly there were two modis operandi for committing suicide. Placing a live grenade under the chin and pulling the pin was one method and the other mortal scenario was by pointing a loaded rifle under the chin and inserting the toe in the trigger guard releasing the cocked mechanism. John saw countless numbers of Japanese defenders with one of their hands and the head blown off, and other Sons of the Rising Sun lying dead or in a sitting position with a rifle in which a bare foot had the toe in the trigger guard.

A bizarre and incredible death scene was viewed by the two marines as they neared their goal. A Japanese soldier apparently was shot dead as he tried to cross one of the make shift dirt roads leading to the front lines. He fell at ^aright angle across the rutted road. Vehicles following the double furrowed road drove over the corpse which partially buried the legs in one rut and the head in the other. His body because of vehicular pressure comp~~iled~~^{LIED} with the contours of the ruts as if pleated by a huge steam iron.

The noxiously incredulous and vulgar ^{dis}regard for life awakened in John the respect and appreciation of the views and beliefs of the American pacifists. Their values and philosophy regarding war and its devastating effects on mankind had

merit which he at one time completely discarded and considered ~~as~~ unpatriotic. To him the horrendous destruction of lives, American and Japanese, made him numb with fear to a greater extent on this ninth day of the battle hundreds of yards behind the front line than on D day when he ran up the Iwo's beach head. On this ninth day of the ragging battle, he returned to the island to witness the abominable carnage. Death by the hundreds was common place. John began to question his presence on the blood soaked dot in the Pacific. He passed several serious questions to himself: One of the self imposed queries was, "Suppose I'm shot dead at this very moment as I gaze ^{at} ~~about~~ the horrors surrounding me; just what effect ^{will the} ~~the~~ loss of my life have on the outcome of the battle?" Of the many answers that he conjured up, the first and foremost answer in all candor and without any taint of sarcasm was that he would end up as a statistic. The soliloquy continued, "The high command does not know me from millions of GI Joe's and my death realistically carries no significance on the strategy of defeating the enemy, and the enemy will not change its defense tactics because of my demise. I'm a number and valued at \$10,000.00 according to the GI insurance."

He continued talking to himself inaudibly, "I don't know the purpose of my life, but I do know that I was not placed on this earth to kill my fellow man. What's going on is unnatural. All this killing is madness. And yet, the enemy fired the first

shot, and is a threat to our way of life. This is not the time to turn the other cheek, but to point our guns at him and fire." An oxymoron conclusion was reached, "it is evil to kill, but to kill the enemy is good because it's necessary," he continued murmuring "I wonder what Saint Augustine and noted scholastic philosophers have to say about this mess on Iwo?"

His sense dulled by viewing the appalling waste of lives, a loud voice from the side of a knoll broke the stupor by someone shouting, "Hi John, good to see you. We all thought you were," in a low apologetic sounding voice, Chick Castaneda added "dead." Milton Pairque, Dick Hines, Smokey Adcock and others in his platoon resounded with sincere hellos and a lexicon of good wishes. the blind and the lame had returned to the fold. John joined his unit and Tucker had united with his. The company captain joined in the impromptu welcoming committee and extended his warm welcome. The guys were sharing a "C" ration, frying bacon on a small fire, brewing coffee and enjoying smokes as John related the episode from hitting the beach, being hit, his hospital stay and return to the island with Tucker.

The evening of the same day, First platoon of Company B was on the front line relieving another platoon. It was quiet on the front line with the exception when a Japanese soldier broke from behind our line attempting to rejoin his unit. As he ran through our defense line into no mans land, all hell broke loose and the master of

the yellow race was cut to shreds by M1 rifles and Browning auto rifles. The dog stationed with the platoon failed to sniff out the Japanese runner, however, his timing was off. As he sprinted from one line of defense to the other, a parachute flare ignited and exposed him as he ran and the firing that followed ended his foot race.

Several offensive strikes were made at the enemy and each day the Japanese defensive perimeters were shrinking. Mt. Suribachi fell earlier in the campaign, on February 23, D+4. It was the highest piece of real estate on the island: 556 feet high and it was here that the famous flag raising took place with the efforts of the 26 Marines and immortalized in the Associate Press by photographer Joe Rosenthal's classic wartime photograph. In the weeks that followed other Marine Corps units advanced northward on the hellish terrain. The Japanese had constructed a maze of underground tunnels with hidden artillery. The enemy tanks were no match against ours, thus the Japanese sometimes dug their small, light tanks into the terrain converting them into deadly pill boxes. The closeness of opposing forces, sometimes ten yards apart or less, made assault ~~readily~~ an exchange of hand grenades and small arms fire.

The first platoon of Company B converged on a large cave and the flame thrower was about to set off pyrotechnics when a Japanese officer came out with a

hand raised and the other holding a flag of truce. He spoke in Japanese which no one understood until he uttered in English, "translator." The sun was setting, soon it would be dark, and in about 30 minutes the platoon had a translator. The sum and substance of the dialogue between our marine and the Japanese officer was that his men in the cave wanted time to deliberate the predicament that was imposed on them by our presence. The enemy stated that at 11 PM a determination ^{would} ~~shall~~ be reached and that he will at that hour inform our translator of their decision. It was learned that there were sixteen enemy troops in the cave.

The platoon position^{ed} itself by spreading the men above, below and facing the mouth of the cave at a safe distance, expecting perhaps a surrender, but more so a banzai charge in a manner of living up to the Bushido code, "Death as a true test of loyalty." Eleven o'clock was announced in whispers among the posted marines, the situation was disseminating uncertainty and anxiety, fifteen more minutes elapsed and nothing happened. Confusion and perplexity was expressed in hushed voices as the men anxiously hoped for the appearance of the Japanese officer, when suddenly a hell raising blast of lightning and thunder erupted. A volcanic explosion of fire, smoke and debris came out of the mouth of the cave, like a mega super shotgun, or a huge cannon giving off its last breath of death. The tumultuous detonation vaporized the soundness of mind^s several marines became disorientated,

shell shocked or semi conscious John was above the mouth of the cave and when the blast was set off the ground shook and an enormous wave of fire, smoke and dust billowed out of the earthy cavity. The horrendous wave of terror and debris engulfed him as he instinctively curled into a fetal position, covering his face and head with his arms. He survived the pernicious blast unscathed but frightened almost to death.

It was obvious that the cave dwellers chose suicide as expected, but with the design of taking a few of us with their Hari Kari mission. The likely scenario was that the enemy stalled for time to collect all the explosive materials that they could muster and then the big bang - them and us.

First platoon was relieved, and the men settled down hundreds of yards from the fighting front. The enemy sporadically lobbed rockets at the areas to the rear hoping to distract our respite and perhaps with a lucky shot disrupt supplies from coming to the front. The missiles were not effective, and at times one could see the rockets flip end over end as they flew overhead exploding harmlessly on the wasteland. The "flipping wiles" were more of a nuisance than a threat. Finally mail call was sounded, ^{after} ~~over~~ a hiatus of almost three months. Latest news from the home front was a treat and a change of pace, a delightful diversion which for the time being eased the discomfort of a shell hole.

John's on again off again romance with his high school first love was off again permanently. One of the letters mentioned that she eloped with a fellow worker at the defense plant. Violet wrote several letters passing on the latest news from the avenues. Her letters were a breath of fresh air and her messages from home and the mundane things she wrote about eased the hardships on Iwo, at least for a short while.

On a bright sunny morning Company B was moving on a newly gained area, closing in on the remnants of the enemy forces. An error of judgment or a breakdown of communication was manifested. We were mistaken for the enemy by the artillery observer and we were fired on by our big guns. The so called "friendly fire" was deadly. The company executive officer was killed plus two non Coms and several Marines were wounded. The barrage lasted perhaps a minute or less but it seemed as never ending. The dust, confusion and cries of help was like a segment taken out of Dante's Inferno. Correction of mistaken identity was radioed to the rear in matter of seconds but the snafu was a disastrous mistake. In the course of sweeping the enemy off the island, assaults were made by our forces against the ^{areas of the} several high grounds held by the enemy. One of the costliest results in human lives was the assault on Hill 362, but the victory was ours, and the Japanese defeat was inevitable.

Iwo Jima's topography and weather conditions played strange tricks on the inhabitants. The nights were chilly, sometimes cold, but the days usually were warm. The volcanic soil was cool, but the bottoms of the deep shell holes were warm. The deeper the hole the higher the temperature, in fact some men dug deeper in the shell holes to insert the contents of their "K" rations to warm their tins of food. When the rains came, there was instant fog and the tender mist held a frightening shroud over the men in shell and fox holes. One could not know or distinguish a friend from foe only by word of mouth or by a pre-established code.

Just by chance, John made an acquaintance with a dead Japanese soldier and spent the night with the non communicative, neatly dressed warrior. Advancing into no man's land, it was necessary for John to take instant cover. An enemy soldier, either a day or days previously made a dug out partially camouflaged. He might have been a sniper or a scout -observer. The sun was setting and the shadows were becoming longer and darker. A split second decision was made on the open field by John even though he feared a booby trap. John took a chance and hurriedly flopped beside the dead man in the dug out as mortar shell^s exploded in his immediate area. The rigormortised soldier was clean shaven, good looking and his uniform was not stained with blood even though there was a trickle of blood on the left side of his head and on the back of his neck. A two by four inch snap shot of a young woman

was meticulously placed between two rocks in the dug out. John did not disturb the corpse nor the picture. Here was, it seemed, an untold love story with an operatic tragic end. The rest of the night was quiet with repeated interruptions of parachute flares lighting the sky and the monotony of the stillness was broken at times by the sporadic small arms fire.

The following day the company commander gave a fifteen minute briefing on an assault on a given quadrant in the northern area of the island. The operation was laid out for the following day, commencing at 800 hours. John's platoon was at half strength, and the majority of the squads were made up of replacements, untested in combat. Orders were issued verbally about one half hour before the assault and each squad was assigned to a given section on the front line. Fifteen minutes prior to the over the top strike, the enemy held positions were heavily saturated with mortar and artillery fires. The rugged terrain distorted by numerous shell holes disallowed the use of tanks to spearhead the assault. During the fifteen minute barrage, one of the shells detonated too close to John's fox hole. Shrapnel's struck him in the right forearm, left hand and his left thigh as he was crouched in the shallow rocky and sandy cavity. The wounds were deep, but not life threatening. A corpsman dressed his wounds and motioned him to go to the rear, away from the action. There was a great deal of small arms fire and occasional deafening

explosions. Verbal communication was very difficult and the arm and hand language was the accepted semaphore. Behind the lines of combat, he was picked up by a jeep and driven to the field hospital in about one half hour or less. Two hours later he was airborne and hospitalized at the Guam Army base where he remained for two weeks. As an ambulatory patient he was then flown to Pearl Harbor for rest and recreation. At the end of the fourth week following his wounds, he was back at Camp Tarawa, Hawaii, falling out for roll call. He was one of the nineteen Marines out of the original company of 144 men to sound off his name. The camp for the first two weeks had the aura of a ghost town, empty and sad. But the situation changed and the man power increased. It was good to be back and within two months the conditions in the camp were normal; as it were before the invasion on Iwo.

On March 14, 1945, Iwo Jima was declared secured, but pockets of enemy diehards continued fighting. On March 26, the few hundred remaining Japanese mounted a final Bonsai attack and were wiped out by the Fifth Marines. The battle claimed more than 6,800 American lives: 5,453 of them Marines, placing the said figure in another perceptive, about one-third of all the Marine deaths in World War II. More than 25,000 Purple Hearts were awarded along with 27 Medals of Honor, 14 posthumously. In the opening days of August 1945 the atom bombs brought the

war to a victorious end. The peace treaty that followed granted Japan to regain control of Iwo Jima. What comes around goes around!

Several of John's comrades in arms ^{felt} ~~are feeling~~ a deep seethed "let down" in the ~~disappointed~~ ^{in the} manner that the struggle with Japan culminated. Perhaps Iwo could have been isolated for at least four more months prior to the finalization and perfection of the super bomb. The invasion and the loss of ^{over} 6,000 American and 22,000 Japanese lives could have been averted. Today, only a relatively small number of men, namely those who struggled and fought on Iwo Jima know and lived the real story. Could it be that the price for victory was too high, and the invasion too soon and too optimistic?

By late July 1945 the 5th Marine division was almost at full strength. Camp Tarawa was a bee hive of activity. The daily military schedules settled down to a regular routine and replacements filled the void in the ranks. One bright afternoon, following the noon day chow, ^{told him} an officer whom John had never seen, curtly ~~stated~~ to prepare himself for a transfer. "You'll be going to school as soon as your orders come through. Perhaps in 7 to 10 days you'll be state side," he added in a cavalier tone. The prospects of a change with news of a transfer did not sit well with John. There were too many loose ends and ambiguity of destination and goals were all wrapped in a puzzle.

During Iwo's "horrible bella," the First platoon had a total of five lieutenants who were the designated officers as platoon leaders. The first leader, a young officer, Stanley Holmes, was mortally wounded on D-day. The four replacement officers led the platoon for various short periods of two days to one week. They were generally the sniper's favorite targets. John was not obsequious to accept the idea of going to school to gain an officers rank.. Fortunately a completely new scenario unraveled unexpectedly. Since he was wounded twice in the same action he was granted a thirty day furlough. He was home in North Tonawanda in ten days.