

## **A MARINE'S DIARY**

### **OF WORLD WAR II SOLOMON ISLANDS, TULAGI, GUADALCANAL, TARAWA, SAIPAN, GUAM**

**by ROBERT L. KEVAN, PFC., U.S. MARINE CORPS**

"Well, it is about September 13, 2004 on a Monday, and my daughter wanted me to record some things that happened back sixty some years ago. I will try my best.

#### **Buhl, Idaho**

I was born January 14, 1923 on a small farm in Buhl, Idaho to Charles W. Kevan and Martha Katharine Nicholson Kevan. I had five brothers, Wayne, Bill, Jim, Dick, and Ron, and one sister, Fern. When the United States declared war against Japan because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, I enlisted with the Marines to fight for my country.

#### **San Diego, California**

Anyhow, I was in the National Guard for a while before I joined the Marine Corps. I joined the Marine Corps on January 6, 1942, Third Battalion, 10th Regiment, 2nd Division. I went down to San Diego on the train for boot camp. I was immediately put in the hospital for a hernia. So I spent some time in the hospital and, lucky me, I missed the boot camp. So when I got out of the hospital I went directly aboard ship approximately June 1, 1942.

#### **USS PRESIDENT HAYES**

##### **Tonga**

We left port on the USS President Hayes on July 1, 1942. It was uneventful until we got to Tonga Tabu, and we got in a little storm so we had to anchor there for a while and let the storm go by, and then we continued on and on July 10, 1942, we crossed the equator. It was quite a deal for us farm boys. July 18, 1942 we crossed the international dateline and we didn't have any idea where we was going yet, but we were told a little later that we were going to the Solomon Islands.

#### **Solomon Islands**

##### **Tulagi**

##### **Gavutu**

So on August 7, 1942 we invaded the Solomon Islands. I went ashore on Tulagi. It must have been the 3rd or 4th wave because the infantry had to gain enough ground to get the artillery on there. We had to climb down long ropes to the Higgins boats which were to take us ashore. Then we jumped off the Higgins boats. We were fired upon and returned fire, but none of our unit was killed. The first or second wave had knocked down the resistance. We were armed

with guns and we were the communications system with pack howitzer guns. We were the communications section on the artillery so we had to establish an observation point. We worked our way up to the tallest point on the island. We were called the forward observers to spot targets for the guns. We had a communication system and radioed it back to the battery to tell them where to fire and how many rounds to fire and so on. We directed fire for maybe a few hours and then the fighting was over. Anyhow, it didn't take too long on Tulagi, but, you know, it was quite an experience to walk across dead bodies and they was already starting to smell and it was quite traumatic at that time. Anyhow, it didn't take too long to secure the island. Also we were the forward observers for the Naval gunfire, but they never came, so our duties were over in 2-3 days on Tulagi. And, then Tulagi belonged to the United States. That was the first offensive action in World War II against the Japanese.

On Tulagi I got dengue fever. Plenty of people got sick there. We stayed in a makeshift sickbay of a tent, bunkbeds, and mosquito netting. I had a high fever and was deathly ill. I cannot remember very much about the illness. They said Dengue fever did not kill people, but we buried quite a few Marines from it.

Also on Tulagi, I spent two hours aboard the ship, USS IDAHO, and I ate a can of Spam I was so hungry. I must have eaten it all because I have hated Spam to this day.

I can remember right across from Tulagi there was a little island, 'Gavutu' and that is where we lost our first man. Old Kokatovich was killed on Gavutu, and they had a little battle over there. But we got the island secure, and stayed there until December. Gavutu was a little island 1/2 mile long and a few miles wide. There was a lot of enemy on it, and we found out later that there was quite a few of them when we shelled it and closed the entrance to their dugout. Quite a few Japs lost their lives there. We did not know there was that many Japs on the island. We found it out later. We lost Kokatovich there who was a close friend of Sully's.

## **Guadalcanal**

In December 1942 we went over to Guadalcanal to help them out over there. And, Guadalcanal, well, that was a different thing. It was swampy, with equatorial heat; and it wasn't too good of conditions. We had all our communications equipment when we went ashore. We went there to help them out and direct ship-to-shore naval gunfire. Guadalcanal was pretty well secured at that time. Although we did have to go back and straighten their lines by firing at spots where the enemy got too close. There was a period of time for over a month when we had no food. The Naval battles were taking place there just off the coastline, and they could not get any food and supplies into us. We was starting to get hungry and couldn't find anything to eat, but anyhow we survived and we done what we had to. We scrounged for taro roots and rice which was infested with bugs and generally whatever we could get. They gradually got some ships in there, and when the Army arrived, we were provided K-rations and food. I also contacted Malaria at Guadalcanal and was pretty sick.

## **New Zealand**

On January 30, 1943 we left Guadalcanal and headed for New Zealand. We landed at

New Zealand on February 7, 1943 (approximately) and we stayed and had our two weeks vacation and which there was about 10 of us didn't think they gave us a vacation on time, so we just took it and it was illegal, but we spent a couple weeks in Hastings, New Zealand. And we had quite a liberty, and when we got through and run out of money, we marched back into camp and told the Captain we was reporting for duty and he was a heck of a good Captain or he would have probably shot us on the spot. But he told us to go back to the barracks and to stay there until he came up with a decision. So his decision was that we got one week of bread and water. We called it 'piss and punk', but it was supposed to be one week bread and water; and we had a lot of good friends that was in charge of the brig there and so we got a lot of cheese burgers and hamburgers and we survived.

## **USS HAYWOOD**

### **New Hebrides**

And then I suppose around October 24, 1943 we went aboard the ship, USS HAYWOOD. We left New Zealand November 1, 1943 and stopped in New Hebrides for a minute. Never got off the ship.

### **Tarawa**

In November 1943 we headed for Tarawa, a little island they called, 'Betio.' It was one of the worst battles I was in. So, we went in with the second wave and found out they didn't land us on the beach; they couldn't get across the coral reef, so we had to wade about 600 yards in water up to our arm pits and being shot at all the way in. The battle on Betio was a fierce battle because the closest we could get was on the beach where there was a wall area. There was logs about three feet high, and we had to lay behind them until the fighting ceased. It was reef barriers and we laid behind them with our feet in water for about 72 hours. There was only a couple of guys in our unit that got hit, in the Naval gunfire unit. In the meantime, they had trained us for naval gunfire, a few of us, and we was to direct the Navy gunfire into targets on Tarawa. I was part of an eight-man infantryman artillery squad to direct ship-to-shore Naval gunfire. So we got in there, and the Sargent had to take over. We established communications with the ships and helped the Infantry and Major Chamberlain and Major Crow with the 8th Infantry. They gave us orders on what to fire on and we did; and we helped them out. On Tarawa we directed Naval gunfire. We was issued a grid. We would call in the grid number to the Navy ship and they would fire on that grid where the bunker was. They would fire one shot to see if they could hit it. And, if they hit it, they would call, 'SALVO' on that grid; or if they was low, we would tell them so many yards up and so many yards to the right on that grid; and then they'd be right on. And then we'd order a SALVO. Right before the shell would hit, they'd holler, 'SALVO,' and they'd holler 'SPLASH,' and we'd duck and see the shrapnel hit. We were pretty close to it. So they hit the bunkers that way. Their gunfire was real accurate. We fired on a big cement bunker which entrapped a lot of Japs there. It was a real heavy bunker that we couldn't get through, but I think the concussion stirred them enough that they couldn't stand it any longer; so after about 70 hours of fighting, our soldiers stormed the bunker with the flame throwers. The Japs would come

running out, and the flame throwers would get them. After we took that bunker, the battle was really over. So it was just mopping up from then on. But it was 72 hours of hell.

Two Marines in our section were killed. I survived along with five other Marines in our section. We received five (5) major battle stars, four (4) stars for the Pacific battles/campaigns, and two Presidential Unit awards.

## **Helen**

On November 23, 1943 we went over to Helen, a little island right next to Betio, and, man, did we rest! We picked us a tree, and went to sleep under it, and whaddaya know, in the middle of the night, a dang Jap sniper came out of the tree I was sleeping under and stepped on me and started running; but they got him in a few yards and he was dead the next morning, so everything turned out alright.

## **USS HAYWOOD Hilo, Hawaii**

And then about November 24, 1943, we left Tarawa on the USS Haywood and December 1, 1943 we landed at Hilo, Hawaii. Well, we went over to Hilo and they took us up to the Parker Ranch up on top of the mountain and next to the volcano mountains, Mauna Kea or Mauna Loa, I forget which one. Anyhow, it had snow on top of it; it was colder than heck up there. We got one blanket to hold us over and we like to froze to death. But I think that is where they reported us missing in action because we went with the Infantry over to Hilo and the outfit we was supposed to be with came back on a different ship a little later.

A few days there, our outfit came a marching by, and they was going to Parker Ranch too. Captain Winters was surprised to see us and said he thought we were all killed. Captain Winters was in charge of the 75 mm howitzer battalion, and he thought we was all killed for some reason. But, luckily, the message never got sent home to the folks. So, we fell in with the ranks, and we finally got some bedding and went to work. We stayed there long enough to fill our ranks again and settle down pretty good. We were not supposed to leave the island, but my brother Bill was over at Honolulu at Hickam Field, so we went down to Hilo airport there and asked a couple of the pilots if we could fly over with them. And, it was a couple of dive bombers we went over in and the trip was uneventful, although Seabold, the kid that went with me, thought they said, 'Bail out.' He did not know how to hook up his parachute so he was pale as a ghost when we got to Hickam Field; and anyhow, we got to Hickam Field and asked what time they was going back and found out they wasn't even going back, so we was stuck at Hickam Field and we wasn't supposed to leave the island of Hawaii; so I asked my brother Bill the next morning, 'What do you think we are going to do?' and he said, 'Well, I have got a little plane that I have access to and I will fly you over and land you on the little airport where you used to have roll call at Parker Ranch, and he said, 'I'll land you right there.' And so fine, and he went out to the hanger and that little plane was tore down. And so he asked a Colonel if he would fly us over in a B24 and he was going to go over to Hilo, and so he flew us over to Hilo and we went back. In the meantime we had Bill write our commanding officer a letter explaining why we was late, what we was doing over there and he explained it very well, and our CO had told us before that

if we come in and he asked us what happened and we had no excuse or anything, he said, 'You're going to get the maximum.' So, I figured, well I'll talk and let Siebold hold the letter, and then when I get through talking, he can talk, and I'll hand the letter to the CO, and that worked pretty well until Captain Winters finally held up his hands and said, "That's enough fellas; get back to your damn barracks.' And, like I said, he was a real good officer, and so we lucked out again, and we was restricted to camp a couple of weeks and that was all.

## **USS SHERATON**

### **Mariana Islands**

#### **Saipan, Guam, Tinian**

So, when we got through rejuvenating our forces on Hilo, we embarked on the USS Sheraton, and that was May 1, 1944. And then we got to the Marianas about June 10, 1944; and June 18, 1944 we landed on Saipan. We was still in Naval gunfire on Saipan. We went to shore on the 1st or 2nd wave and we was all set up our communications for Naval gunfire and I don't think we did too much of that; rejoined our old unit when they didn't call for Naval gunfire and we set up our observation point with radio and telephone on Saipan and directed the gunfire for the 75 mm pack howitzer, and I do not know how long it took there, but it was some pretty fierce fighting there on Saipan. We were fired on and a couple guys were killed at night by a Jap coming in and stabbing him. We stayed in our foxholes which were covered by other troops with gunfire and we could hear the Japs yelling all the way down so we know they got them.

## **USS CUSTER**

### **Guam**

Then around July 18th, 1944 we embarked on the USS Custer and we landed on Guam on July 21, 1944. Our duties on Guam was more relieving the citizens that was being held hostages there. Guam was a lot easier. People were being held hostage and it was kind of a mop up operation. We relieved the people who were being held there by the Japs. There were quite a few civilians who were being held hostage. It was a United States island to start with, and we just took it back. So it was a United States island when we left.

We successfully secured both Saipan and Guam which was very important because Saipan and Guam straddled Tinian. Tinian had the airport on it that launched the Enola Gay airplane which had the atomic bomb on it. So evidently, it was critical to secure the islands flanking Tinian. Our forces had very little resistance on Tinian because the outfit that went in there said they had very little fight and they secured Tinian fairly easily. But that was the launching point for the big planes to bomb Japan at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

### **Seal Beach, California**

July 18, 1945 I did a little guard duty after I got back to the States at Seal Beach, California where they had bombs stored.

### **Kodiak, Alaska**

After I had guard duty at Seal Beach, they took me on a ship to the territory of Kodiak, Alaska. I was stationed there for guard duty from July to January, and then they flew me back to Seattle and that is where I got my honorable discharge on February 1, 1946.

## **CONCLUSION**

But I hope you can understand this, and I hope no one else has to go through a war like this again. But we done what we had to do, we was glad to do it, but we wouldn't do it over again for nothin', unless we was invaded again. And, I can tell ya it gives us pride to do it, but the ones that didn't survive, they're the ones that take all the credit. But anyhow, I think prayers that my mother and all the folks back in the States give us, got us back and out of the war safe. All four of us brothers came out safe without any scratches, so we got a lot to be thankful for. Hope this is okay, Jana."

Jana Wickham-Allan  
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