



**Dale Richard Luton**  
**A Personal Military History**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division**

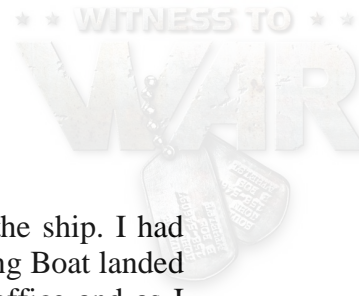
**BACKGROUND**

I was born June 13, 1924 at 115 South Xanthus, Tulsa, Oklahoma in the same room where my Father, Frank Lewis Luton, died ten years later of Parkinson's disease. My Father was an Independent Oil Driller who was born in Petrolia, Pennsylvania. My Mother, Dora Mae Latchaw, was born in Barkeyville, Pennsylvania. My Mother moved to Tulsa around 1910 where she owned a boarding house at 22 East 2<sup>nd</sup>. Her sister, Maude owned a boarding house at 10 North Main. My Dad picked up Mother in a horse drawn surrey and asked her to marry him and she did April 15, 1916. I was the youngest of six children. In 1935, my brother Paul Wayne, at the age of fifteen (15), was hit in the chest with a bat while playing baseball in our back yard. The bat slipped out of his best friend's hand. Six months later, my Father died at the age of fifty-eight (58). My Mother was left with three children in the home, during the great depression. Mother's sisters wanted her to put us in an orphanage but she refused. When I was seventeen (17), knowing the war was coming and I would be drafted, also to ease the load on her, I asked Mother to sign for me to get in the USMC. Later she said if she knew what the Marines did, she would not have signed.

**INDUCTION TO MARINE CORPS**

On October 15, 1941, I joined the United States Marine Corps at the age of seventeen (17). I was sent to San Diego, California by train. On the way, the train stopped for one hour in Phoenix, Arizona. I walked past a bar and heard the song, "Take Me Back to Tulsa," by Bob Will's band. I thought that might be a good idea, ha! On arrival at San Diego, I was bussed to the Marine Recruit Depot. We exited the bus and a Drill Instructor started yelling and did not stop for the next six months. We got the usual shots, hair cuts, etc. December 6, 1941, thirty day passes were issued. Sunday, December 7, 1941, the Base loud speaker announced Japs hit Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. December 8, 1941, the passes were picked up. We missed the 7<sup>th</sup> week of boot camp. I was sent to Camp Elliott and assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, First Brigade. We boarded a luxury ship, the Luraline, on January 6, 1942 and left San Diego and headed southwest. We were escorted by the aircraft carrier, Yorktown, as I recollect sixty-five years later.





## **ABOARD SHIP**

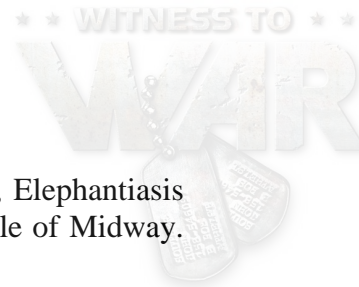
Assigned as a Brigade runner, my job was to deliver messages all over the ship. I had been in the Marines approximately three months by now. One day, a Catalina Flying Boat landed between the carrier and the Lualaba. Later that day, the General came into the office and as I stood nearby, he opened a small safe. There were some manila envelopes — he placed one on the deck between us. Written on the envelope was Samoa! I thought, Private Dale R. Luton, in the Marine Corps approximately 90 days, knew where we were going. We landed at Tutuila, Samoa, Pago Pago on January 20, 1942. I had no idea it would be three years before I would be back home following thirty-two months in the South Pacific. My family didn't know where I was but Tokyo Rose knew!!

## **SAMOA — JANUARY 20, 1942 – OCTOBER 15, 1942**

Stationed in a village called Coconut Point, I was assigned to a Motor Transport Company. We loaded and unloaded ships, mostly gasoline in fifty-five gallon drums. Every so often, one would have Tulsa, Oklahoma painted on the side. I supposed Samoa was the fuel depot of the South Pacific.

On March 3, 1942, I was doing mess duty near the beach, washing pots and pans. The day before, the flexible pipe on the stove used for heating water, had sprung a leak. The other Private and I went to get a five-gallon can of kerosene. The cans were unmarked and he got gasoline instead of kerosene. Being unfamiliar with gasoline, I said I would make it hot around here and poured gas under the half barrel. The gas can was square and I punched a small hole in opposite corners. There was hot metal under the sand and the gasoline caught fire. I threw the can and gas splashed on me and I was on fire across my chest. I ran a few steps, tripped myself and threw sand on me. I walked to the Company Aid Station.

The Corpsman stood with his mouth agape. I said, "Don't just stand there, Doc, give me some morphine, I'm burning!" This was a Motor Transport Company and the only thing they could find to transport me was a motorcycle with a side car and the seat cushion was ajar. I said, "I'll ride in back of the driver." A few yards from the Battalion Hospital, the motorcycle got stuck so I walked to the hospital. They cleaned me up and two men came with a World War I ambulance to take me to the Division Hospital where they cleaned my wounds. Being seventeen (17), I asked if this would get rid of pimples. I said, "I sure won't try this again" and then I fainted. For the next twenty-one days, I was in a tent, on a cot, covered with mosquito netting. I had a lousy doctor! He treated me with tincture of purple hydrate and tannic acid. Puss would run down my chest to the pajama string, then onto the bed. Every other day, the doctor would have me stand and pull the scabs off. He would then put more medicine on the burns. After several days, he started using two different sulfa drugs, Sulfanilamide and Sulfathiazole. You could almost see the healing start. I was discharged and went back to my company. I believe they expected me not to come back. I got my sea bag with only my shaving kit and cut off khakis which I used for swimming. I borrowed a 'T' shirt and went to the Captain and asked him to take me to get uniforms. I'm still waiting on him! Driving trucks, I soon had uniforms. They called it 'midnight issue'. Officers wanted me to be their 'mess boy'. For the first meal, they had a gallon of ice cream. I served small portions and I ate a lot. I lost my job — ha!



Samoa is a beautiful island and harbor, but, they do have big mosquitoes, Elephantiasis (arms like Popeye, legs of massive size), etc. We were very lucky due to the battle of Midway. I'm sure Samoa was next on the Jap's battle plan.

We left Samoa on October 15, 1942. We took a lovely cruise across the rough Coral Sea where we were sent to relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division on Guadalcanal.

### **GUADALCANAL — NOVEMBER 4, 1942 – JANUARY 31, 1943**

We made a practice landing in the New Hebrides Island on the way to Guadalcanal. November 4, 1942, we rode Higgins Boats onto the Guadalcanal beach. We met the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division men who looked dirty, tired and weary. I can safely say they were glad to see us. We were told to dig fox holes. The soil was very hard. I got about two inches deep with a hole the size of a grave. Ten or twenty Jap bombers came over the mountains heading for the ships. This inspired me to dig down four more inches by the time they got overhead. Another guy and I eventually dug it big enough and deep enough for two and covered it with coconut logs. Even though it was big enough for two, four or five got in it when "washing machine Charley" came over at night.

When Carson's Raider Battalion landed, they headed right into the jungle. They didn't come back for several days. I believe the Palmolive Soap Company owned coconut groves where we were camped. A Raider came out of the jungle and asked me where he could get some food. I told him they were serving food around a certain tent. As I watched him, he held out his mess kit with his spoon held over it. The food hit the spoon first and he started eating.

We had our cots with mosquito nets on them. During the night, my arm would get against the net and it would be a solid welt the next morning.

I was sent to the #2 fighter strip to drive a scramble jeep and to pick up pilots. I hauled Major Joe Foss to his Grumman Wildcat several times. He later became Governor of South Dakota. Once, on his return, he told his Crew Chief to paint two Jap flags on the plane. He shot down twenty-seven planes, got the Congressional Medal of Honor and became a General.

Another day, I met a pilot at his plane which was full of holes. As he got out, you could see that his parachute had been hit. He sat on the parachute. I said I'd better take him to have it checked. Only two panels were undamaged. He asked that a scarf be made for him out of one of the panels. I asked for a scarf too and I still have it....

The Air Control office was in a cave. I would go in and listen to the pilots talk during dog fights. We listened to short wave radio from San Francisco. They announced the fighting was over on Guadalcanal. About that time, a bomb landed near us. A guy said, "I'm glad it's over or one of those things could kill you."

We had some supplies but had to eat wormy Japanese rice and US 'C' rations, etc. Eventually, the army landed and they had rows of food head high. I was still at the fighter strip. Our Captain had us help haul Army supplies. Two men were on each truck, one drove and one picked out cases of food. We had two storage tents full. As we were getting ready to leave the island, we asked what to do with the food. We gave it to the CB's — tents and all.

We left Guadalcanal January 31, 1943.



## **WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND**

To date, we have had no fatalities in our company. We were transferred to fill in here and there. And, I am still a Private!

I went to C2 Medical Hospital at the upper hut in a horse race track. James Crowell, from Idabel, Oklahoma, and I went to be ambulance drivers, however, the first thing they did was to put us on K.P. (Kitchen Police) to wash dishes. We protested, to no avail. I said OK, we will do it for two weeks and then we want out. Two weeks later, we said get us out of here. He said no! Being slightly nuts, and we were using the race track's China dishes, I said, "Get us out or we will break every dish in the house." We broke every dish. The mess Sergeant called the C.O. — a doctor. We told him our story. He told the mess Sergeant that we told him what we would do so he should get us out of there. A few days later, two Marines showed up. The C.O. said, "We didn't ask for anyone but, Luton and Crowell, you go to B2 Medical Hospital and you new guys stay here. We went to a train stop town call Paekakariki. The first person we met was the C.O. He said, "Are you both Privates? You're promoted to Private First Class."

Having been on Jap rice, etc., I was really thin. B2 Med's mess Sergeant was great. Even doctors would come down and cook at night. A guy from a line company showed up and said that he was a pastry chef at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. He baked up fancy desserts at night and we put them on the chow line the next day. I made pumpkin pies. I volunteered so much that I had the run of the kitchen. I would cook a whole slice of ham and eggs for breakfast. At noon every man got a pint of ice cream. Crowell and I would wait and when the ice cream was soft, we put two or three pints in a pan, add five or six eggs, and use an egg beater and mix it up. I gained several pounds. I volunteered so much that eventually, my job was to light the fire under the water to wash mess kits!

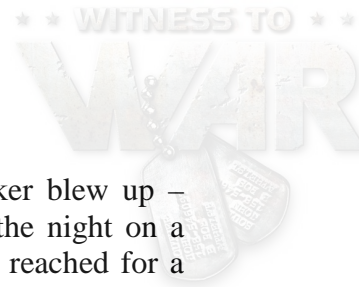
New Zealand is a beautiful country and at that time, it was populated with seven sheep to one person. They had narrow gauge railroads and drive on the left side of the rode. In August, I sent a picture home of me in a sheep skin coat. My family had no idea where I was. They thought I was in Alaska.

We made a practice landing at Hawks Bay, New Zealand. The waves were so rough they lost some trucks so they took some back to Wellington. While on the way to Hawks Bay, some of us went in the 'hold' of the ship. We saw the General's jeep next to a jeep ambulance and switched two of his new tires to our jeep. As I watched the ambulance come down the ramp, the two new tires stuck out like a sore thumb! I said, "I'm getting our ambulance out of here, as the General's jeep will be next." Sure were nice tires!!!

## **TARAWA GILBERT ISLANDS — NOVEMBER 20, 1943 – November 24, 1943**

I have proven that breaking dishes might get you killed! We broke the dishes at C2 Med. C2 Med stayed in New Zealand, loaded their equipment and then took a leisurely cruise to Hawaii. B2 Med went to TARAWA — THAT WAS ME!

We landed on a Higgins boat. When the ramp was opened five Marines were going from right to left down to the beach. The third one had blood on his bayonet. One guy asked where the front line was. They said we were standing on it. My thought of the moment was "Dale, what have you gotten yourself into now?" I guarded the aid station and was a stretcher bearer. We found a Jap near the aid station and killed him. My rifle jammed and I didn't get off a shot. The sun went down and I got into a shallow trench. The coral was sharp and hard to lie on. I would doze off and wake up, sitting up with bullets going by. Sun-up came and we moved the aid station down the beach and I worked there. During the afternoon, an interpreter tried to talk some



Japs out of a bunker but they refused. They used a flame thrower and the bunker blew up – throwing “whatever” all over us. Due to the sharp coral, we decided to spend the night on a stretcher, which was a bad idea. I heard a Jap crawling just over the sea wall. I reached for a hand grenade and the stretcher sounded like a drum. I lay quietly and some men killed him at sun-up. Betio was where the air strip was located. It was two miles long and eight hundred yards wide at the widest point. It equaled one square mile. There were two to three thousand Japs on it. All but seventeen were dead. One thousand twenty six Marines died immediately in this seventy-two hour battle. Many more hundreds were wounded. With the fighting over, we moved to the next island in the atoll where the main hospital was located.

The C.O. assigned sixteen Marines for guard duty, with four men located at each post. The other three guards woke me for my two hour turn. With very little sleep for three days, I still was put on guard duty. I sat down on a five gallon gas can and immediately went to sleep. The other three who saw no fighting, stood my two hour watch.

Thanksgiving dinner was hot ‘C’ rations — the best I ever had.

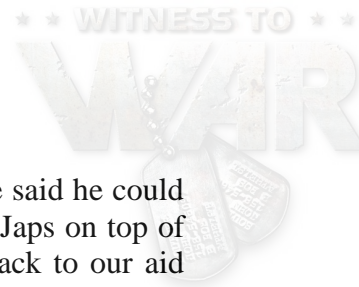
### **CAMP TARAWA ON THE BIG ISLAND OF HAWAII**

We spent approximately five months in Camp Tarawa on the Parker Ranch preparing for our next island invasion, Saipan. One day, I walked past the nose and throat doctor and I said, “take my tonsils out.” He told me to sit down and took them out. On Samoa, I left some burned skin, in New Zealand, a wisdom tooth was pulled and now, tonsils were removed in Hawaii. I have body parts scattered across the South Pacific. On leaving, we were put aboard a transport docked at the Honolulu Clock Tower where we stayed several days. The rumor was that a submarine was taking pictures of where we were to land. Finally, we put to sea. We rendezvoused and anchored with many ships — I can’t remember where. A fresh water tender rammed us on the port side of the front hold where I was. It felt like we were going to turn over. The damage was repaired and we finally headed for Saipan where we anchored. We slept on deck and I awoke with three hundred ships shooting at one Jap plane. No one hit it. The evening before, I barely found room to lie down on the deck. When all the guns started going off, I awoke and was the only one on deck.

### **SAIPAN — JUNE 17, 1944 – JULY 9, 1944 — GILBERT ISLANDS**

I landed the second day and drove my jeep ambulance ashore. The aid station was inland. I got there and loaded an officer with the side of his head caved in and took him to the beach. I put him on a Higgins Boat to go to a hospital ship. It was evening and I was told about thirty Jap tanks were coming and I couldn’t go to the aid station. Fortunately, they knocked out the tanks before they got to us. Good ‘ol’ Bazookas. I began hauling wounded where needed. Soon, one evening, I looked out to sea where hundreds of ships lay anchored — aircraft carriers, four battleships, etc. The sun came up — and all the ships were gone! We found out the Japanese fleet was coming — this is when the Marianas turkey shoot occurred. All the Jap planes were shot down and they also lost their aircraft carriers. You sure felt lonely with an empty sea to look at. A few days later, I saw four battleships coming over the horizon. Later, they fired sixteen inch shells ashore that looked as big as a jeep as they flew through the air.

As the front lines moved, I continued moving up just behind them, driving my jeep ambulance and spending nights at the aid station. I was going up to the front to pick up wounded. The Army had one part of the front line. They advanced 1,000 yards in one day. They did not replace their ammunition before dark. The Japs pulled a banzai charge and took back the 1,000



yards. I was at the front to pick up wounded and an Army guy came up to me. He said he could not run fast enough as they retreated, so he got in a foxhole and pulled two dead Japs on top of himself. He said Japs would get in the foxhole from time to time. I took him back to our aid station. We got two empty cans of coffee. He drank his down like it was iced tea. He finished his and I gave him mine. I told him that he needed it more than I did.

The Marines had a light tank with a flame thrower and lots of riflemen on each side of it. They would sweep flame across in front of them. The Japs would jump up and the Marines would shoot them down.

The Marine General, Holland M. Smith, had seniority over the Army General of the same rank and kicked him off the island. General Smith was called "Howling Mad Smith." Marines took the 1000 yards back.

Later, I was at the front line aid station where mothers threw their babies off the cliff and jumped after them. The Marines were advancing and called for four ambulances — I was the fourth in line as we passed a ring of barrels. I was stopped by an officer who told me to go into a sugar cane field and bring back an old man, a young woman and baby. I did and went up to the other ambulances. When I got near, I was flagged up behind a rock wall. The other three ambulances had been shot up. They brought the third driver behind the rock wall. There was no doctor there. My friend had been shot in the lung by a machine gun on top of a hill. He was gasping for breath and said, "I'm a big baby." The doctor told him they nicked his lung and that we would get him to the hospital. The doctor signaled me that he would not make it. He died in a few minutes. I took him to the cemetery. He was so brave. I took some wounded to the hospital. There were stretchers all over the ground. A doctor was checking patients and asked me to help him carry a man to a Quonset hut operating room. The patient had been hit on his femur between the hip and knee. The doctors said stay and help us so I stayed. I held his right leg as they amputated his left leg. The doctor happened to be one of the best orthopedic surgeons in New York. The assisting doctor said the patient would have lost more of the leg if he had done the operation. It was very interesting.

One day, I brought in a Japanese woman whom the Jap Army had held in a cave. When they turned her loose, they cut her tongue half way across so she couldn't talk.

I brought in four tiny babies that had been shot. I doubt that any of them made it.

I have the book 'Follow Me' — the story of the Second Marine Division in World War II. My picture is on page 218 nearest the camera as a stretcher bearer. On page 219, is the type of ambulance I drove.

We were told on July 9, 1944 that anyone having 32 months overseas could get their stuff together — we were going home. My shirt tail didn't touch my back until I was aboard ship.



*(Dale Luton in the front, on the left)*

## **GOING HOME**

The ship fed most of the food to the Marines who were going to Saipan. Thus, we were fed beans and bread frozen and dry. They warmed it and it had to be eaten while it was hot. No one griped because we were going in the right direction. We stopped in Hawaii for supplies — the food was then better. We landed in San Francisco and took a train to the Recruit Depot in San Diego. There was no air conditioning on the train. Guys were waving Jap flags and samurai swords.

We received new uniforms and orders along with a thirty day furlough. I arrived in Tulsa on September 17, 1944. On September 23, 1944, I married Betty Ritter, the girl that waited for me for three years. She was fourteen (14) when I left and seventeen (17) when I got home. She followed me to San Francisco. The Marines had no barracks there so we shared a flat with a family of four — we had a bedroom and shared the bath. Then, we lived in two rooms at the back of a garage under a flat and shared the bath with the parents of a young woman whose husband was in the service and she had two children. We were thrilled to get it and it wasn't bad at all. I drove out of a motor pool at 100 Harrison Street until November 1945 and drove a camera car on V.J. night on Market Street. I also went to the Alameda Air Station to pick up American POWS, who had been held captive by the Japs. I was mustered out of the United States Marine Corps after four years, seventeen days. Betty and I moved back to Tulsa on January 1, 1946 where I worked for the Fire Department. I retired as a Captain after 32 years of service to the city of Tulsa. I've been retired 28 years now and am still married to the same lady for 62 years to date. Betty and I have two children, six Grandchildren and six Great Grandchildren. We have two daughters. Linda was born August 28, 1946 and has been married to Ron for 41 years. Ron and Linda have three children, Paul, Jennifer and Steven and one Granddaughter, Morgan. Ellen was born June 10, 1949. Ellen's husband, Bill, died of Cancer in 2000 after 31 years of marriage. Bill and Ellen have three children, Lori, Billy and Brittney.

They also have three grandsons, Chad, Jonathan and Jacob and two granddaughters, Bryannah and Biancah. Ron and Linda live in Locust Grove, Oklahoma and Ellen lives near her Grandchildren in Florida.

On June 13, 2006, I will be 82 years old.

Dale Luton died October 22, 2007



**Betty Luton with Dale's blue star during WWII.**



**Betty and Dale Luton**