



**"All Gave Some; Some Gave All"**  
**Submitted by Pam Geurin for Robert D. Sohrt**

I enlisted in the Marine Corps at Rapid City, South Dakota on 08 Dec. 1943. I was 18 years old and lived in a very small place in the heart of the Black Hills called Mystic. We had a post office and a general store, but that was about it. Mystic was made up of loggers and miners; people who scraped a meager living out of the land. I had never been very far from home or beyond South Dakota. I was told that I would have 10 days before I had to leave, but on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1943 I boarded a train to Omaha, Nebraska and then on to the Marine Corps Base at Camp Elliot in San Diego, California.

I went through basic training in San Diego where the enclosed platoon picture (#1) was taken. (I am in the top row, 4<sup>th</sup> from the left.) All of these guys were from either North or South Dakota and were all about the same age as me. The picture of me in the Marine Corps dress blues uniform (#2) was also taken in San Diego. It is from a street vendor who had a photo booth for all branches of the service. San Diego was a military town that catered to the military. For a small price, you could get your picture taken in dress blues, which was a big deal! I might also point out that no enlisted man during WWII (as far as I know) actually owned a "Dress" uniform.

We left San Diego aboard a Navy troop ship called the U.S.S. Rochambeau in early June 1944 for "whereabouts unknown." All we knew was we were going somewhere in the Pacific. I also knew that to the Navy we were just "cargo," so to speak. Our "battle stations" were our bunks, and we were crammed in and stacked about four high below the deck of the ship. We spent a lot of time there and we were grateful every time they called us topside for fresh air. While on board ship on 14 June 1944, I was officially transferred as part of the 56<sup>th</sup> Replacement to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. I was assigned the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Mike Battery. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a Howitzer artillery battalion. It was to be our job to provide general artillery support.

We landed on Pavuvu in the Russell Islands (a staging area for training) where we practiced from June until 25 Aug. 1944. I remember Pavuvu vividly. It was a miserable place with nothing on it but heat, mosquitoes, rats, land crabs, rain, rotting coconuts and C rations. Many guys got heat stroke or malaria. I remember our training officer's name was Corporal Lovegreen. He was in charge of us "boots" both on Pavuvu and during battle. We were constantly on drills and he made us repeat over and over "your rifle is your best friend" and "keep your helmet on and your head down!" He would occasionally ask me "Sohrt, how ya doin?" Just fine sir, I always said.

We were joined on Pavuvu by members of "*The Old Breed*"<sup>[1]</sup> of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. These men were guys who had fought on Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester and New Britain. They had seen it all, and were vital to us "boots." We did a practice landing on Guadalcanal. I remember some of them expressing reservations about going back to the same battlefield where so many of their buddies had died. I did a lot of listening.

We only knew a couple of days in advance that we were about to attack. We landed on Peleliu, the Palau Islands, on D-Day 15 Sept., 1944 as part of "Operation Stalemate II."<sup>[2]</sup> I learned much later (from studying the battle) that we landed on Orange Beach 3.<sup>[3]</sup> I was originally assigned part of a four man team on the 105 MM Howitzer. The gun (a cannon really) required the team to first set up the gun securely on its legs. One man would then site in the gun. The second man would open the breech; the loader would load the barrel and the second man would close the breech and fire.

I do not remember the short trip from the Amtrac to the beach, but I clearly remember the fear as we landed. I also instantly realized that it was to be our job to set up the gun and dodge bullets at the same time. We faced intense fire and shelling and also struggled to secure the gun because of the sand and coral terrain. Corporal Lovegreen's words "Keep your head down!" took on a much clearer meaning.



I was quickly reassigned from the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines to the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines as a BAR man (Browning Automatic Rifle) where I stayed for most of the battle. I told the sergeant who gave the BAR to me that I hadn't used one since basic training. He replied "Don't worry son, by tonight you'll be an expert." And so it was. It was my job to provide fire power and security for the flamethrowers, who could not defend themselves while they were operating the weapon, as this USMC photograph shows. <sup>[4]</sup> I remained a BAR man for most of the battle. I was



never assigned one group, but moved around wherever they told me to go.

Other units used mortars and napalm to clear the terrain in order to expose Japanese positions. Then we would come in and flush them out of their hiding places with flamethrowers and BAR men like me. We used whatever means we could to fight and defend our own lives. This was not an easy task to say the least. The Japanese were so well hidden that often we could not even see where the shooting was coming from. They also used dawn and dusk and put on Marine Corps

helmets for disguise. The disguise worked just long enough for them to walk close enough and shoot us from close range.

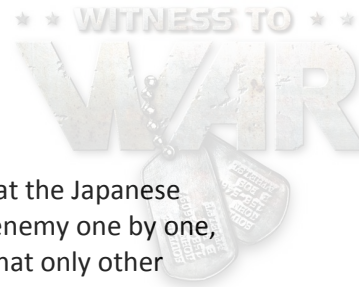
For me, the nights were the worst. We could take an area in the daytime only to find that the Japanese stayed underground and came out from behind us with snipers. We put up rocks for cover because the coral made it impossible to dig foxholes. I don't remember sleeping much because of the fear that a sniper was just ahead, to the side, or behind me. I could hear but could see nothing. Every sound seemed deadly to me because we knew they crawled into foxholes and killed guys with knives. When the eerie nighttime silence was broken up by sporadic gunfire, I was always reminded of where I was.

We also faced many other obstacles. The heat was relentless and guys got heat exhaustion. Even our water made us sick because it tasted like gasoline from being stored in old oil drums. The terrain was also very difficult to maneuver around in. We were constantly dodging shelling, grenade attacks; mortar and sniper fire while covering very rough terrain wherever we went.

Most importantly however, we fought an enemy that was ruthless and believed their mission was to fight to the death. I remember hearing that the Japanese were told propaganda that we could only be Marines if we had killed our mother. Without knowing it, we were up against the hardened warriors of the famed "Kwantung Army" that had invaded China in the late 1930's. Colonel Hough later wrote that they were "one of the oldest and best units in all of the enemy's armed forces."<sup>[5]</sup>

I have read much about the Battle of Peleliu throughout the years. Military planners said that it was d to be a 3 or 4 day campaign. <sup>[6]</sup> It was not. Peleliu is a very small island only about 6 miles long by 2 miles wide. <sup>[7]</sup> The Japanese had invaded Peleliu and with their combined military (and forced labor Koreans) built over 500 elaborate underground caves and a connecting tunnel system with kitchens, sleeping quarters, medical care and clean drinking water. <sup>[8]</sup> Our Naval pre-bombing was ineffective and did little to take out their men or weapons because they were concealed and heavily fortified. This meant that they held the ultimate defensive positions to come at us full force after we landed. Many Marines died or were wounded in the first three days. We continued to move as others continually fell around us.

As the days wore on, Corporal Lovegreen's words "Your rifle is your best friend" also took on a much deeper meaning. Fear, instinct, training and a desire to stay alive became all I knew. Even though there was not time to think much, I still knew that I was a part of a collective group of Marines at war; an inseparable brotherhood, who were fighting to keep each other alive. As powerful as all our weapons were, I also had the sense (at times)



of the odds we were up against. The longer we fought it, became clear even to us “boots” that the Japanese would rather die than give up. They were out to kill every one of us. We fought this type of enemy one by one, inch by inch for over a month and in my opinion, we did so with courage and determination that only other Marines who fought there can truly understand.

I learned later technical term for this type of Japanese battle plan was called “attrition.”<sup>[9]</sup> Colonel Nakagawa and his forces had completely rebuilt the entire island before we even landed so that they could take out every last Marine they could. From my perspective, we were set up for the worst without knowing it, but we still fought on. We were faced with only two choices; kill or be killed.

I have read different accounts about the exact number of men that participated in the battle of Peleliu. Suffice it to say that the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division landed about 9,000-10,000 men on Peleliu and Japanese forces numbered almost 11, 000.<sup>[10]</sup> We were about 20,000 men on one small island with one mission. One book by Jim Moran & Gordon L. Rottman even titled their book “*A Forgotten Piece of Hell*”<sup>[11]</sup> and up until recently no one had even heard of it. Many history books on battles in the Pacific do not even mention Peleliu. I have not forgotten what took place there.

Umurbrogol Mountains, Umurbrogol Pocket  
Area of the Horseshoe and Five Brothers, Hill 140  
Oct.18, 1944

By mid October we had worked our way into the Umurbrogol Mountains engaged in an intensely fierce battle in the ridges on the northern end of The Horseshoe and Five Brothers near Hill 140.<sup>[12]</sup> I did not know at the time, (but learned later) that the island had been declared “secure” and had been turned over to the 81<sup>st</sup> Army Infantry Division on 15 Oct. 1944 to “mop up.”<sup>[13]</sup> From a military command point of view those words have meaning, but those of us Marines who remained did not agree. I am living proof that wasn’t so and that it only takes one bullet. I had managed to remain in battle up until the end of the entire campaign, well almost.

My original 11<sup>th</sup> Marines, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Mike Battery had indeed already left the island because most of the heavy fighting had been completed. I had been recently reassigned what was left of the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines. The Japanese still held a place called the “Umurbrogol Pocket” in the Umurbrogol Mountains. I was assigned on a M116 75 MM Pack Howitzer team. The tanks and big guns couldn’t always go up into the ridges and valleys where we went, so we used the smaller weapons like the 75 MM Howitzers. This was a smaller portable gun that could be moved around.

We had just rolled the gun up a ridge and were getting into position on about four caves directly across from us. I remember we had just fired a round and the gunner set down some binoculars on the tire. I picked up the binoculars to see if I could see what kind of damage we had done. I was shot by sniper fire on 18 Oct. 1944 and landed straight into a Navy Corpsman’s lap. I remember someone immediately performing medical attention to me. Corporal Lovegreen was there at the time and he asked the Corpsman where the hit was and how bad it was. I remember hearing someone say that “It’s pretty bad because it is a head shot.” I also remembered Corporal Lovegreen words “keep your head down!”

The Navy Corpsmen were medics that were always assigned to Marine Corps units and went with us wherever we went. Their main job was to provide medical triage on the battlefield. They were held in the utmost esteem by the Marines and were actually part of our unit. I am sure those Navy Corpsmen saved my life, as they also saved many others.



I would also like to give credit and my utmost thanks to the black Marine stretchers bearers that carried me from the battlefield. I now know that they were members of two segregated African-American companies within the 16<sup>th</sup> Field Depot Units <sup>[14]</sup> or possibly the 17<sup>th</sup> Special Naval Construction Battalion, (a United States Navy CBs or Seabees, stevedore units.) <sup>[15]</sup> These black Marines volunteered to bring up ammo on stretchers and carry out the wounded from the battlefield. They faced intense fire, even death like the rest of us, but with the added factor of being in completely segregated units. Without those guys risking their own lives while carrying me out, I would not be here today. I might add that the Japanese targeted stretcher bearers and the wounded because they were defenseless.

I was carried to a first aid station on the beachhead, which by now was secure. I remember the doctor who treated me the next morning said, "Son, you've been shot in the head and you're livin on borrowed time." That is the last thing I remember until I was brought on board the Navy Hospital ship, the U.S.S. Solace, the next day. My service records indicate that I was treated for a gunshot wound to my right face and neck and also my hand. The Solace was a hospital ship that transported all wounded from Peleliu to the hospital on Guadalcanal, where I stayed from 07 Nov. 1944 until 12 Dec. 1944. I received my Purple Heart Medal while I was in the hospital there.

While aboard the U.S.S. Solace, I remember vividly when we were called topside. It no longer meant fresh air but now meant burial at sea services for those Marines who died while aboard ship. "Taps" ceremonies were all too common. I can still see the flag draped coffins lined up in a row and then one by one their bodies were silently slid over the side of the ship into the Pacific. Even though I knew that burial at sea was necessary and a Navy tradition, I was a Marine and I remember thinking that I thought it was a terrible way to bury a Marine.

I was transported from Guadalcanal to the states aboard another Navy ship called the U.S.S. Admiral Capps. I remember the ship's captain announced that he would "try to make it back for Christmas." It took about two weeks to cross the Pacific Ocean. I vividly recall the landing in San Diego, California. The Navy again called us topside from our "battle stations," but this time not for Taps. They wanted us to see the harbor. We landed at night. I remember San Diego was completely dark, (as were all coastal cities). I looked out my hospital window a long time and I could see only a few lights. I remember because it was Christmas Eve, 24 Dec. 1944. The captain had kept his word.

Once we returned stateside to Camp Elliot in San Diego, I was transferred to Balboa Hospital where I remained from 24 Dec. 1944 until 06 March 1944. After I left the hospital, I was reassigned to a casualty company. I asked to be returned overseas but was told that because of my wounds that I had been classified "unfit for combat duty" and could not return to battle. I was later transferred to a casualty company in Barstow, California, which was a major hub for all types of military personnel movement. Again I asked to be returned active duty and got same answer. I received an Honorable Discharge as Private First Class on 09 Nov. 1945. My monthly pay was \$54.00 a month and my discharge pay was five cents a mile from Barstow to Rapid City, South Dakota. This amounted to \$127.27.

I am proud to say that when I returned home, I became a charter member of the Rapid City Military Order of the Purple Heart and continue to be an active member in the Reno, Nevada chapter. I have also been an active member of the United States Marine Corps League in Reno for many years. I am one of those who have lived by their motto, "*Once a Marine, Always a Marine.*" <sup>[16]</sup> I am still proud of my military service during World War II, as are so many others who have gone before me.

My daughter tells me that she and her family, including my grandchildren, feel fortunate to have been allowed to hear about my WWII experiences from my standpoint. I am now 85 years old and went back to Peleliu on two tours; once for the 50<sup>th</sup> and again on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle. The people of Palau and Peleliu are



still grateful that The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division liberated them from the Japanese. The third photograph is a picture of me from the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration held in our honor in 2004.

My daughter has submitted this application and written this narrative on the occasion of Veterans Day, November 11, 2010. She knows that I would never do something like this for myself because she knows I feel that I was only one Marine. She feels, however, that it is important for future generations to learn and remember. She also knows that I will remain "*Always faithful*" to the United States Marine Corps.

Yes, I received a Purple Heart Medal that I am extremely proud of. But I would also like to point out that "The battle for Peleliu was one of the bloodiest of the Pacific War, that cost the U.S. Marines and Navy Corpsmen 6,526 casualties, including 1,252 killed in action."<sup>[17]</sup> Many authors agree that "Considering the number of men involved, Peleliu had the highest casualty rate of any battle in the Pacific War."<sup>[18]</sup> I am also deeply proud that I served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, a division that was the most highly decorated Marine Division in World War II and the only one to receive three Presidential Unit Citations for their actions.<sup>[19]</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division has definitely earned its proud and lengthy history of being "*First to Fight*."<sup>[20]</sup> The fourth photograph, therefore, is a tribute to those who those Marines. It is a picture of a United States Marine memorial cross on Peleliu. It is for those who died on a small island in the South Pacific.

I now know that my assignment of "going where I was needed" **always** meant there were heavy casualties elsewhere. I was only one Marine who survived and considers myself fortunate enough to have lived to tell about it. Our hope is that by submitting this narrative, in some small way it will contribute so future generations will always remember that "All Gave Some; Some Gave All."

Semper Fi,

Bob Sohrt

Submitted by Pam Sohrt Geurin





## References

1. Flowers, Mark. *The Story of the Old Breed's Nickname and Divisional Patch*. Database online at: World War II Gyrene, <http://www.ww2gyrene.org/>, <http://www.ww2gyrene.org/index.htm>, [http://www.ww2gyrene.org/spotlight\\_1stmardiv\\_patch.htm](http://www.ww2gyrene.org/spotlight_1stmardiv_patch.htm), accessed August 5, 2010.
2. Hough, Frank O., USMC. *The Assault on Peleliu*. Database online at: HyperWar: World War II on the World Wide Web, accessed August 5, 2010, [http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-M-Peleliu/Chapter\\_1,\"\\_Background,\"\\_page\\_1,\\_paragraph\\_1](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-M-Peleliu/Chapter_1,\). Originally published as U.S. Marine Corps Historical Monographs, USMC Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, (U.S. Marine Corps, 1950.) Archived at United States Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, [http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Home\\_Page.htm](http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Home_Page.htm), <http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/General/Publications.htm>.
3. Gayle, Brigadier General Gordon D. USMC (Ret). *Bloody Beaches: The Marines at Peleliu*. Database online at: HyperWar: World War II on the World Wide Web, accessed August 5, 2010, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-C-Peleliu/index.html> <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-C-Peleliu/maps/USMC-C-Peleliu-3.jpg>, "Introduction," map, page 34. Originally published as Marines in World War II Commemorative Series, Marine Corps Historical Center, (Washington D.C., 1996), # PCN 190 00317 00. Archived at United States Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, [http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Home\\_Page.htm](http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Home_Page.htm) , <http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/General/Publications.htm>.
4. USMC Photograph, *To the Shores of Iwo Jima*. Database online at: SignalAlpha.com, <http://www.signalalpha.com/index.html>, [http://www.signalalpha.com/World\\_War\\_Two.html](http://www.signalalpha.com/World_War_Two.html), [http://www.signalalpha.com/Iwo\\_Jima.html](http://www.signalalpha.com/Iwo_Jima.html), accessed September 13, 2010. Originally published in *To the Shores of Iwo Jima*, 1945 documentary edited by Warner Brothers for the U.S. Government Office of War and Information on the battle for Iwo Jima.
5. Hough, *The Seizure of Peleliu*, Chapter Two, "Planning and Preparation," <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-M-Peleliu/USMC-M-Peleliu-2.html>, page 17.
6. Flowers, *The Pacific Battleground and The World War II Marine*, War II Gyrene, <http://www.ww2gyrene.org/pacific-battleground.htm>, page 3 of 7, paragraph 6.
7. Hough, *The Seizure of Peleliu*, Chapter Two, "Planning and Preparation," <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-M-Peleliu/USMC-M-Peleliu-2.html>, page 14.
8. Gayle, *Bloody Beaches: The Marines at Peleliu*, Chapter Two, "The Japanese Defenses," <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-C-Peleliu/index.html>, page 10.
9. Moran, Jim & Rottman, Gordon L. *Peleliu: 1944 the forgotten corner of hell*. Online book summary at: [http://www.ospreypublishing.com/store/Peleliu-1944\\_9781841765129/](http://www.ospreypublishing.com/store/Peleliu-1944_9781841765129/), accessed July 3, 2010. Originally published (2002,) ISBN 9781841765129.
10. Donigan, Maj. Henry J. "Peleliu: The Forgotten Battle," *Leatherneck, Magazine of the Marines*, July 25, 2010, accessed August 24, 2010, <https://www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/peleliu-forgotten-battle>. Originally published September 1994.



11. Moran and Rottman, *Peleliu 1944: The forgotten corner of hell*.  
[http://www.ospreypublishing.com/store/Peleliu-1944\\_9781841765129/](http://www.ospreypublishing.com/store/Peleliu-1944_9781841765129/).
12. Gayle, *Bloody Beaches: The Marines at Peleliu*, "The Umurbrogol Pocket: Peleliu's Character Distilled,"  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-C-Peleliu/index.html>,  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-C-Peleliu/maps/USMC-C-Peleliu-11.jpg>, map, page 37.
13. Hough, *The Seizure of Peleliu*, Chapter VII, "The Umurbrogol Pocket,"  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-M-Peleliu/USMC-M-Peleliu-7.html>, pages 168-169.
14. Nalty, Bernard C. *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II*. Database online at:  
<http://www.nps.gov/archive/wapa/indepth/extcontent/usmc/pcn-190-003132-00/index.htm>, accessed August 24, 2010. Originally published as *Marines in World War II Commemorative Series*, Marine Corps Historical Center, (Washington D.C., 1995). Archived at United States Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, [http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Home\\_Page.htm](http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Home_Page.htm) ,  
<http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/General/Publications.htm>.
15. McDonald, Jason. Public domain photos: *Seabees of the 17th Special Naval Construction Battalion Wait to Assist Wounded of the 7th Marines on Peleliu*, and *African-American Seabees of the 17th Special Naval Construction Battalion on Peleliu*, Database online at: World War II Multimedia Database,  
<http://www.worldwar2database.com/gallery2/v/wwii1431.jpg.html>,  
<http://www.worldwar2database.com/gallery2/v/wwii1429.jpg.html>, accessed August 25, 2010.
16. *usmc1.us*, "United States Marines Quotes." Database online at: <http://www.usmc1.us/index.html>,  
[http://www.usmc1.us/maine\\_quotes.html](http://www.usmc1.us/maine_quotes.html), accessed August 24, 2010.
17. Gayle, *Bloody Beaches: The Marines at Peleliu*, "Was the Seizure of Peleliu Necessary? Costs vs. Benefits," <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-C-Peleliu/index.html>, page 48.
18. Antil, Peter. *Peleliu, Battle for (Operation Stalemate II)-The Pacific War's Forgotten Battle, September-November 1944*, (2003). Database online at: Military Encyclopedia on the Web, HistoryOfWar.org,  
<http://www.historyofwar.org/index.html>), <http://www.historyofwar.org/battleframe.html>,  
([http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles\\_peleliu.html#aftermath](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_peleliu.html#aftermath)), accessed Sept. 24, 2010.
19. Flowers. *Unit Awards to the First Marine Division in World War II*, World War II Gyrene,  
[http://www.ww2gyrene.org/spotlight\\_1stmardiv\\_awards.htm](http://www.ww2gyrene.org/spotlight_1stmardiv_awards.htm).
20. Sturkey, Marion F. "Selected USMC Slogans," *Warrior Culture of the U.S. Marine*, excerpt online at:  
<http://www.usmcpress.com/index.htm> , [http://www.usmcpress.com/heritage/usmc\\_slogans.htm](http://www.usmcpress.com/heritage/usmc_slogans.htm), accessed August 09, 2010. Originally published (Heritage Press, 2001).