



Richard Vana

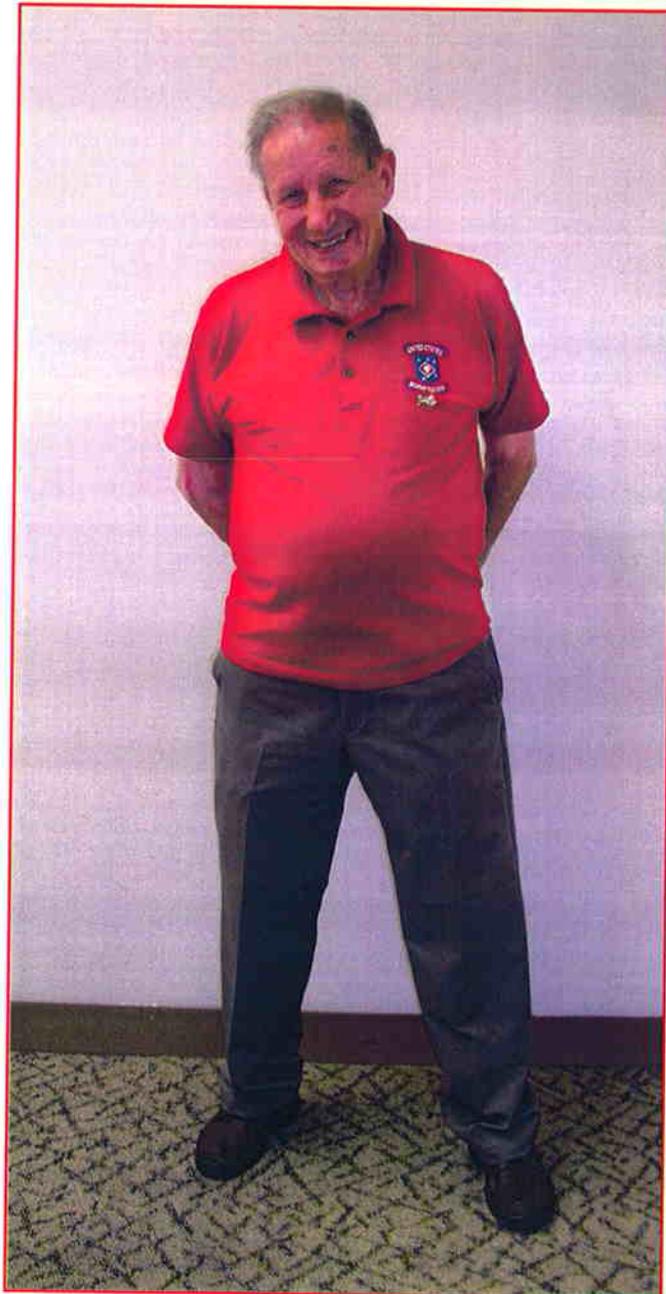
**World War II, Pacific
U.S. Marines
Corporal
1st Raider Battalion**

Richard Vana

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
July 9, 2008**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Richard T. Vana**

Rank: **Corporal**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Marines**

Theater: **World War II - Pacific**

Unit: 1st Raider Battalion

Interview Date: July 9, 2008, 2-4:30 p.m.

Place: Group Study Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project Interview is being conducted on Wednesday, July the 9th, in the year 2008, here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I'm a member of the library reference staff, and I'm speaking with Mr. Richard Vana. Mr. Vana was born on December the 15th of 1923 in Chicago and now lives in Des Plaines. Mr. Vana learned of the Niles Library's participation in the Veterans History Project through an article in a local newspaper, the Journal, and he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Mr. Vana has already been interviewed for the Library of Congress VHP collection in association with Boy Scout Troop # 6, and he was interviewed by Chicago TV personage, Mr. Paul Mienke. But Mr. Vana's story will very much strengthen the collection here at the Niles Library, as we attempt to capture the spirit and achievement of American forces in World War II, so we are looking forward to interviewing our neighbor from Des Plaines, as it were, this afternoon.

So, Mr. Vana, when did you enter the Service?

January, 1943.

And were you living in Chicago at that time?

at 4318 Lawrence, right near where you live. I think you live on 4600 on Kenneth

That's right. Very good memory. . Did you-- had you completed high school at that time?

No.

So you were in high school awhile--

No. I had left high school due to financial situations.

What high school were you attending?

At that time, Schurz.

Oh, Bulldogs.

Yes.

So what were you actually doing before you got the call?

At that time, I was working at Capper and Capper at 100 N. Michigan in Chicago.

That was a men's

a men's clothing store. And we also had our newsstand at Kildare and Lawrence, my brother and I, which we had from 1933. I was only ten when we started that newsstand, but we still had it at that time up to those years.

Your family, had they been living in the United States a long time?

My folks were born in Chicago. We lived at-- I was born in the South Side actually at 1314 W. 52nd Street. I was baptized at Visitation Church.

Oh, at the famous Visitation, yes.

Yes, on 55th Street, I believe it was.

Yes. And then your family moved?

We moved here when the Depression hit. We moved here in 1932.

To the North Side?

To 4838 North Lowell which was the home of my mother's brother, John. And then, later, we moved to 4739 Lowell and then finally wound up at 4318 Lawrence, which was really Lowell and Lawrence.

Yes.

So you were used to facing hardship in growing up?

You know, if you say hardship-- The Depression years were difficult, naturally, as a boy particularly. But everybody was in the same boat. You had a common bond, and you didn't really think it was a hardship so much. My mom fed us on five bucks a week. I mean, I know that for a fact.

And I started delivering *Daily News* on Saturday where if I sold fifteen papers, I got a quarter bonus, so it wound up if I sold seventeen, I would get forty-two cents, which was pretty good at that time, you know.

And I think I was probably nine when I started that and then ten when we got a newsstand.

So in the year 1942, you were probably expecting to be drafted?

Oh, I was ready to go in. And up until November or September of '42, for whatever reason, as I recall, you had to be twenty-one to enlist on your own without your parents' consent. So when my brother went in, then I went in to the Marine Corps at the same time. I decided I would get in.

And that's when you were drafted?

Well, I went into the Marine Corps. I volunteered for the Marines.

Yes.

And your brother, did he also go in the Marines?

No. Navy.

Navy.

He went into the Navy.

Why didn't you go in the Navy?

Well, I just liked the Marines, that's all. I was going to-- I liked adventure.

Yes. It must have seemed like the Marine Corps had a little more to offer in that respect?

As a matter of fact, when I was in boot camp, I asked to be-- I had two choices, one was paratroopers, and one was the infantry, and they put me in the artillery.

Yes.

So shortly thereafter, about two weeks after I was in the artillery, they had a notice on the bulletin board for volunteers of the Raiders. And myself and another fellow, Jack Thomas, volunteered for the Raiders. And that's how I got into the Raiders.

So you left the artillery and went to the Raiders?

The Raiders all volunteered at that time. It was twenty-one and under. I don't know what the situation was afterwards, but, at that time, you had to be twenty-one and under to volunteer for the Raiders.

And then was that, also, your sense of adventure that was--

absolutely. I mean, not only that, not only the adventure part, but I was a patriot.

Yes. Yes.

The flag still brings tears to my eyes.

And the Raiders, you knew you were going to do something, if you were in the Raiders.

The Raiders were special. They really were. They were formed in January of 1942. And Churchill and Roosevelt wanted to come up with an outfit similar to the Commandos. Jimmy Roosevelt was a Raider, James Roosevelt was a Raider, Franklin's son. And that's how it all got started, the 1st Raiders were Edson and the 2nd Raiders were Carlson. And, actually, the Raiders, we didn't always work together, until we reformed as the 4th Marines in 1944. In 1944, we formed, and then we worked together.

So when you joined up, were you inducted then at Fort Sheridan or--

No, I was went downtown to a recruiting office.

And then you went off to?

Then I went by train to San Diego.

San Diego?

Yes.

Was that Pendleton or--

No, we went to Camp Elliott.

Well, actually, the base, the Marine Corps base was where the boot camp was. And then I went to Pendleton from there, and the Raider training was at Tent Camp Two, which was just outside of San Onofre, yes, near Oceanside.

So you received special training as a Raider?

Oh,, it was all special training. It was very intense, very intense.

In terms of physical demands and--

Oh, absolutely.

And technical skills?

Oh, absolutely. You fired every weapon. And I wasn't great at karate or anything like that, but I was fair, you know.

Yes.

But they taught you all the tricks, you know.

And did everybody make it through the Raider training?

Not everybody.

No. The first night we got into camp, they managed what they called a fire trail up in the mountains and so forth. They'd move us out at midnight, and that's how it was right on this road. But it was intense, but almost fun, in a sense. It was challenging. That's a better way to put it, it was a challenge.

Yes. Was that first time you ever spent any length of time away from home or had travelled in the United States?

I'd never travelled anywhere up until that time.

Well, that must have been an interesting experience, having all these people from different parts of the country--

Well, that was my point.

Yes.

My point today was for young people. I'd encourage everybody to get into the Army or the Marines, or whatever, because just the adventure, itself, and the meeting of the people from all sections of the country are so just different, that's all.

And you were able to get along with everybody?

In the Marine Corps, you get along.

Everybody got along.

Well, I just want to go to a story on Okinawa.

Yes.

Okay. There are some guys that don't get along. And Roy Godwin and Fred Arrowsmith were two that didn't get along too well, personality conflict, or whatever it was. But we were on a hill in Okinawa, and the order came through to hold your fire. And Roy was halfway up the hill, stationed, positioned halfway up the hill, and he let a round go down

into the valley below. And I yelled up to him, "Hey, Roy, did you hear them? They said, no, hold your fire." And at that instant, a machine gun burst right under him. It kicked up all the dirt in front of him. And he yelled back at me, What'd I say? What'd I say? He was from North Carolina. And I told him. At that very instant, another burst goes off. He gets hit. It looked like the head. The first one out to him was Arrowsmith, the guy that he didn't get along with.

What a story.

The first guy out to him. He starts dragging him down and, of course, the shots hits him. And they riddled him pretty good, too. So, we threw a smoke grenade out there when I got up there. They were laying in each other's arms, their blood flowing into one another. It was unbelievable.

Yes.

I mean, here is two guys that didn't get along, but the first one out to him. I mean, that's what the Marine Corps does for you. It's unbelievable.

So it was a very effective training camp, and then the Raider training was very effective.

It certainly was. It proved itself in action.

The Raiders, see, originally, the idea behind it is we would go behind enemy lines.

Oh, right, like the British Commandos go behind lines, yes.

Behind the lines. We did that at Macon Island. We did that at Guadalcanal. The `canal, it was like a decoy to drag the, to draw the Nips into that area. While the main force of the battalions and so forth were coming from another, I'm not going to go into all the details but those were--

Yes, so your mother, two of her sons went into service at the same time, is that right?

Yes. Well, there were just two of us.

Yes.

Jack was in the Navy and I was in the Marine Corps. That was all there is, the two of us and, as a matter of fact, when I was at Emirau jumping into the Higgins boat, I had a complete dislocation of my right ankle. They called it a medial dislocation. The bottom of my foot was facing me. So, they flew me to New Hebrides, yes, New Hebrides, and Jack was on the destroyer escort.

Your brother.

Yes, he was on the destroyer escort. They docked there for a day, and he came to the hospital to see me. So, anyway, I was there for about six weeks and then back to the `canal, you know.

So, when you complete Raider training in southern California, in the San Diego area--

We went right overseas.

You went right overseas. You were a private at that time?

And did you go by boat, or do you fly?

No, we went by ship. We went in the USS Mount Vernon., which was a Queen Mary type steamship, really big, and it went right to New Caledonia. That was where the Raiders had their training down there. That's where we got--

Jungle training?

Well it was-- New Caledonia wasn't so jungle-ish. It was a French area, you know, and Noumea was the capital there. There wasn't any action down there. That was a training point. That was where the Raiders had their training camp. So, we went down there as reserves. And then when they came back, the Raiders in New Georgia had been down to Auckland, New Zealand, on a liberty and then they came back to New Caledonia.

So was that about two or three weeks a month you were in training on New Caledonia?

Oh, we were there, we trained every day. Oh, absolutely, to get ready for whatever action you're going into.

So how long were you on New Caledonia before they--

Let's see, it was 1943. Probably not more than that , I would say, we were there for Christmas, Thanksgiving and Christmas, and then I think we went to Emirau, like in January. I can't remember that exactly, because after Emirau, of course, I went to New Hebrides, because I was injured there, and then I came back to the `Canal, probably in April.

And we prepared for Guam. And we had to hit Guam, we were supposed to hit Guam on the first of June. All of our training there was getting ready. We didn't know where we were going to go, but they had pretty much an idea of what the terrain is like and so forth. And they train you accordingly, so as always we were the first wave on Guam. We didn't hit on June 1st, because Saipan became so intense that they kept us aboard that ship for fifty-seven days, the LST. And the only time we had to stop, in the Marshalls to refuel early in July, and then went on to hit Guam, July 21st. I was hit in the head. I was-- a bullet hit me in the head on Guam. But I just went back. It grazed my head. It went through my helmet. It grazed my head and knocked me out. I was bleeding profusely, but

we just put a bandage on it, and I went back aboard ship, and they scraped the metal out, and the next day I was back on the front line.

Silly question. Bullets can pierce helmets?

Oh, . . . That bullet went near, matter of fact, I'll guarantee you that I really feel I've had a guardian angel, because we were just approaching a knoll, and it was whether I should go this way or that way. And I had my head turned this way, and I think, so help me, I felt something. I turned my head, and I didn't feel like I was doing it by myself, and, as I did, that that bullet hit me, went into the helmet, went around in the side, and tore up my head. I was knocked out, oh, I'll say maybe thirty seconds, you know. I went down on my knees. And then one of the guys had a bandage. We put a bandage on it. And then they said, "Well, get back to the beach." So, I went back to the beach, and back board ship, they took the metal out of it, and back to the front--

Yes. Mr. Vana, you mentioned your guardian angel here--

And also in terms of important effects that keep your spirit going as a human being, you were married before you went overseas?

August 7th, 1943.

Yes, didn't get-- I didn't see my--I went overseas in September and I didn't see Mom (Marion) until Christmas Day, 1945.

So when you went into the Service in '43, did you already know your wife at that time?

Oh, Marion was only thirteen when we were going steady.

Wow.

She was thirteen years old. We met in the fall of 1938. And when she was fourteen, and I was fifteen, we were engaged verbally.

And, as you see from this picture (included in appendix), we had ten children.

Ten children. And, so then, so she must have gotten permission from her parents or something, and then she flew out to you in California to get married?

No, we went to Vegas actually.

To Vegas. Yes.

Anyway, we're getting a little off the track of

Yes.

the other thing. But as far as the guardian angel thing, truthfully, prayer is a preparation for danger and an armor for battle. And that's how I felt. And I don't consider myself any braver than anybody else. I was just given the strength and the courage, the strength and courage through prayer that helped me. I don't know what it could do for other people and I don't know that all guys ever, how many guys did that. But to me, that was my strength. It wasn't a question, it was just a question maybe compared to David and Goliath, and I'm not putting myself in that class, but his feelings were that the Lord was with him, that whatever happens, happens, but I have the strength and courage to endure whatever that will be.

Yes. So, religious faith was important.

Without a question.

For me. I, again, I can't tell someone else.

I recommend it to everybody, but--

So and you were able to stay in some kind of touch with the people back home through correspondence and mail?

Oh, we could write. I mean, I wrote every day that I could when we were in training. When I got to `Canal, at Guadalcanal, or we went back to Guam, I wrote Marion every day that I could. And she wrote me every day. The only thing I didn't get when we were on board ship fifty-seven days, you know, going to Guam--naturally, you didn't get any mail. But when I got there, there was all kinds of mail waiting for me. Some of this, well, none of this is it. This is all I got in Japan, because there was no way I could keep all that mail.

Yes. So, did you have, I wonder if the Raiders ever were found themselves in a place where the USO shows or any famous entertainers--

Never any USO shows.

Never any USO--

Never saw any--

No.

Didn't have any leave, except the weekend I married Marion.

So in terms of combat, so your unit first saw combat on--

Well, Emirau was very mild. Again now, the Raiders, don't forget, we got there as replacements in 1943. They'd only been to Guadalcanal and Bougainville. New Georgia came while we were in training in New Caledonia, so our first action was Guam. I'd say that was the 21st of July, and that was a heck of a landing, because I know Tarawa and Iwo Jima were probably the bloodiest, but Guam was a mess. They must have-- they had mines. The beach was mined, the artillery was zeroed in on you, we must have lost of at least 20 of the LVTs. LVTs are the alligators. They go right into the beach, you know, and take you up maybe 3- 400 yards, depending on how far you have to go. They are like a tank without a top, so we lost at least 20 of them right on the beach, and it was a--

And there were how many men in each one, do you think?

About 18. Yes We had about 17, 18, just about a squad in each one. They weren't all-- all of these weren't lost, but they were-- the LVTs were hit, so they couldn't go any further.

So the Raiders see front line action in Guam, and then you continue on to--

Okinawa.

After Guam, there were other actions, of course, Peleliu, the Philippines, and other actions after Guam. But we went back to Guadalcanal, and then got ready for the Okinawa campaign. And that didn't come until April 1st, 1945, which was Easter Sunday, of course, and we were the first wave there, but resistance on the beach was practically nothing. The way we figured that out, the Japs wanted to fight us on their own way. They were dug in so deep in the hills and the caves. About the tenth day on to the eighty-second day, it was just a new adventure every day.

So Okinawa was the most sustained period of action--

That we had. Well, I was there ninety-nine days, eighty-two days before it was secured, and, then seventeen days, we did patrols and so forth. There was only three of us from our outfit that went through ninety-nine days, myself and Carter. And I tell you, when you look at it now, you wonder how you ever-- I didn't think of it then, but when you see the movies, the war pictures, and the war film of it, you really wonder how the heck did we ever do that!

Yes.

So when you are on Okinawa are you--you've been promoted to corporal?

I was. I don't remember when that came about, but summer after, matter of fact, it had to be after the Guam campaign, I'm sure it was, because I'd already taken over a squad.

So you were a squad leader? Corporals usually--

No, fire team, I was a fire team leader, not a squad leader. I was a squad leader as a corporal, but, usually, a sergeant was the squad leader.

And then a fire team is composed of how many?

Four.

Four, and is that like four riflemen, or?

A BAR man, which is a Browning automatic weapon, not only automatic, and then there's three riflemen, one is the assistant to the BAR man, he carries extra ammunition for him.

And then you were as the--

the fire team men, carried an M1.

You carried an M1?

An M1, yes.

The O3s went out, oh, the latter, I think, early in '42. The M1s, I can't remember when the M1s came in but in '43, they were in.

So you were kind enough to send me a copy here from the Congressional Record of a resolution (included in the Appendix, dated September 28, 2007, entitled "Honoring Heroic Marines" that describes an incident you experienced on Okinawa).

Made by. Senator Elizabeth Dole, yes.

This was on or about the 1st of June, 1945, Baker Company.

Do you ever think of that particular day?

Yes. Uppy (Upchurch) and I talked quite a bit, and we often wonder what happened to Richey. We looked him up. We could never find out. But, again, you know, this is just one story that comes out.

And it was a-- and you received a citation of bravery for this, right?

That's correct. But, again, there are so many of them that occurred that were never reported.

I'm sure.

It was just unbelievable.

So the American forces are victorious at Okinawa, but at some cost.

We lost over 10,000 men.

Yes. And then most people, you were thinking, were preparing for the invasion of--

Well, we were. We were getting ready for the invasion of Japan when the bomb went off. We were back at Guam then. Sure we were preparing for the-- Okinawa was only 400 miles--350 miles from Japan. And Iwo Jima was only 660 miles from there. And that was so important to get that, because of the airstrips, so the planes could bomb the mainland of Japan without having to refuel. They had to get back there, make the round trip, you know.

Yes.

Otherwise, they would be ditching somewhere.

Yes. So there must have been great celebration when Japan surrendered then?

Well, of course, we did, pardon me, but it was more relief than celebration, I would say. I think it, in a sense, it was a combination of relief and celebration. But then on August 27th, we were in Japan.

As you say, you still go to Japan, yes!

So the thing is this. We were looking forward to going home. And then we got the word: no, we're going to Japan. And my understanding, one of the reasons was that the original 4th Regiment went down in Bataan. And we-- and then many of them were sent to Japan in prisons there. And our being the Raiders, the 4th Regiment, we went to Japan and freed them - some of the ones that were freed. And we occupied there. I didn't leave there until about almost Thanksgiving.

You sailed in a boat into Yokasuka?

Oh yes. We came-- I don't remember what kind of a ship we were on, but we weren't on LSTs. Then we came in on a regular steamboat of some kind, whatever it was, troopship, I suppose.

How did you find the Japanese homeland? I mean, did you have any ideas or feelings about it?

I was pretty naïve.

I bet.

To me, the war is over. We shake hands. Everybody is friends now. That was my idea. And, you know, it was funny. I truly made a lot of good friends there, but I was-- I didn't realize the position I put myself in many times, because I travelled on, they had electric trains there very similar to our Illinois Central or even probably to our elevated, and I travelled to Yokohama and Tokyo on by myself. You couldn't carry any weapon with you. And the thought that there was a lot of military, there had to be some military Japs left around that had some ideas about getting rid of you, you know, but I never had any fear of that at all. And I travelled those trains. I had only one bad experience. There were three Nips that kind of looked like they were trouble. And I backed up to the back of the train, but nothing ever came of that. And, as a matter of fact, when I transferred like in Yokohama, they would get to know me. They would have a sweet potato sitting on the potbellied stove for me. And I would bring candy or whatever I could bring to them, too, you know.

Was that in the train station?

Yes, the train where you transferred.

Yes.

Just like where we have train stations here, you know.

Yes.

And they all treated me great. One time on the way back from Tokyo, I missed the train at Yokohama that takes me back to Yokosuka. We were at Yokosuka. The last train had already left, so I was stuck there. And I saw a Jap walking with a little tool of some kind which was like our streetcar motorman had. And I said, "Well, this guy's got to be a motorman." So, in my best Japanese, I-- he informed me that he was the motorman on the first train out. So he says, "Come on with me." And I go to an old shack and there were seven Nips in there. They fixed me on an old straw pad and gave me an old gray blanket. I slept with those seven Nips that night. And we got up at 4:30 in the morning, and I took the first train back to Yokosuka. But, probably weeks later, I said to myself, "What the heck were you thinking of!"

You could have disappeared, yes.

Oh, my! You think that the Lord wasn't watching over you!

Yes.

Or the Japanese weren't watching over you.

So you were on a leave from the base?

Well, you get time off.

See, there, I had a watch from 4:30 in the morning on, and I missed that watch, but Resko took care of that for me. We'd cover up for each other, you know.

Yes.

So I didn't get back until early the next morning.

So was it during your time in Japan that Dr. Matsamoto--

Oh, . I just happened to meet him on the train, and he invited me to his house. He spoke perfect English.

But he was blind.

blind, yes. But he was with his daughter. Kimiko. And they invited me to the house, and then I would-- but he liked to smoke a pipe and so forth, so I brought him tobacco and so forth. And they had me over several times during the time I was there, probably four or five times in the several weeks that we were there. I didn't leave until November, around Thanksgiving, I think. Anyway, when I knew I was going back to the States, well, then he gave me this dress sword or saber as a memento.(appears as middle sword in Appendix) picture. And then, incidentally, when he died in 1948, they sent a special messenger to where I worked to tell me that he had passed on. We had become pretty good friends.

Yes. It's amazing, you're fighting Japanese military personnel, and then you're in their home country and it's like a different--civilians were different or something.

They definitely were. The Nips were cruel. I mean the military were. When we freed a couple of the prisoners, they told us some stories. They would urinate in their rice and give it to them, things of that nature.

Yes. There is almost like a thuggish, brutal tradition which is--

They bayoneted the religious--.

The people I met there were all pretty decent folks, you know.

And even those seven Nips I slept with. I don't know. I can't explain why.

Human nature?

I got along with them.

Yes. Now, the two on the table here, we're taking a picture of this to add at the end of the interview.

Yes.

The two samurai swords, those, you found those?

No. Well, here we were-- this is on Okinawa, too. And we were, Bill Hofer was our platoon leader, Bill Hofer was a quarterback for Notre Dame in 1937 and `38.

Wow.

And he was our platoon leader. I don't know if you've got time for this story.

Sure.

A brief story here. Bill's picture was in the *Tribune* on the front page of the sports section intercepting a pass against Northwestern, and they had little dots, how they ran the pass back for a touchdown. So, when Bill came to be our platoon leader, I told him about that story, and he didn't remember the incident, but, anyway, he was our platoon leader. And Bill and I got along pretty well. At that time, I was already a squad leader. And we were having a heck of a firefight. I'm talking about, you know, bullets flying all over and so forth. And we finally got to the crest of a hill, and things were quiet, and he said, "Listen, we've got to find out what's down there." He says, "Vana," he says, "Go down there and see." Reconnoiter, you know. I'm not going to go into the details, but my job was to go down there, and I could see a shell hole down in the middle. And, again, I was a gambler as well as having my prayers. And I said, "Well, you know, that's about an even money shot, you know, but, okay, I got to go!" So I ran down the hill and got to that shell hole. There was a Nip in there, so I leaped, and, as I leaped, he shot and fired under me, so I landed on top of him. And that night we, he had a samurai sword and I took his samurai sword, and, that night, we had our line there. And I won't say it was a banzai charge, but it was an attempt to get through the lines, and killed several Japs out in front, and another one was, you had to be careful because you don't want-- they could be booby trapped, you know, but these were freshly killed, so I didn't have to worry about that, and then, of course--

So you got both those samurai swords in about twenty-four hours?

Yes. Less than that. This (one), overnight. one I got in the late afternoon, and the other one overnight, you know. And Dick Freideck who brought them back for me, he was run over by a six wheeler on Guadalcanal ten months later. I can't remember how much later. But if this isn't some kind of a miracle! He comes back as a replacement, comes right back to the same company, Charlie company. I was in B company, but he was in Charlie company, but we went to Raider training together, but can you imagine a replacement going right back to the same outfit? They don't do that, you know what I mean, they just --he wound up in the same exact outfit, but he only lasted a day or so, because his ankle would not hold him up. So I said, "Dick, how about taking this stuff back for me?" You

know, he was going back, and I just gave it to him that next morning. And he brought it back, and, next thing I knew, it was in my house.

Yes.

Some time later, but I mean--

Did you ever think of making a career of the military or--?

Oh,. If I hadn't been married, I would have stayed in. I would have definitely stayed in. Matter of fact, I was up for sergeant at the time, and had I had stayed in, I would have made the sergeant rank.

Then you probably would have gone to Korea then or--?

Without a question. McGinnis was-- what a Raider he was! He received a commission in the field. You don't ever see that very often. He became a lieutenant in the field. And he came back, went to Korea, came back again, and he gets killed by a car in California. His sister wrote me from Mississippi. He was from Yazoo City, Mississippi.

So after you complete the occupation duty in Japan, then it's a ship back to the United States?

Yes. It was late November, we left by ship, it had to probably be the middle of November, because we went by the Aleutians, and came back to San Diego, and then took the train back to-- I was going to the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes.

And when we got into Chicago, I jumped off the train and I called Marion, and I said, "Meet me at the Ravenswood El!"

Oh that's on-- is that at?

Lawrence and Kimball

Yes.

Meet me at the Ravenswood. She was there. We took the streetcar home. What a reuniting, I'll tell you!

Yes.

So did you find it-- was it difficult to readjust to civilian life?

You know, it wasn't for me. I don't know. A lot of guys did, I guess. But, I don't know, I was just so glad to be home!

To be home. Did you go back to work with--

I was back there within a week.

They kept your job and everything?

Yes. I went back there in a week.

So did you use the GI bill for anything or--?

I, you know, it was so --I was just-- Marion was always upset with me about that, because I never did. I was able to work, and I never went to school or anything else, never took advantage of all the benefits that they offered, you know, it was really too bad.

Yes.

But I went to, after, in 1950, we moved to Des Plaines in 1950, and I worked for the post office in Des Plaines for five years before we got in the cab business.

And then so you stayed in touch with your wartime buddies, didn't you?

Oh, yes. Sure.

Because I would imagine the bond between the Raiders, among the Raiders--

As I say, we have a reunion coming up in August. There is a camaraderie that you form that it's impossible to express except by the heart.

Yes.

Except with the heart.

So you are a member of the-- are you also a member like the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

No. I was with the VFW and I just didn't keep up my dues and so forth.

Yes.

Nothing against them, believe me. They're great, but I just didn't. But I was with the Marine Corps League and with-- the Raiders had their own organization.

Yes.

Which is very depleted right now. There's not too many left. However, the families of them are honorary members now, so--

So the-- And the reunion this year is going to be held in?

Minneapolis.

Minneapolis. And is there still a Raider division within the Marines?

No. No.

No?

We disbanded in 1944.

It was disbanded?

In 1944, the use for the Raiders was no longer there, because it was hit and run. That was the idea, hit and run. And that was not there. But we were still elite infantry, so they used us for that. We became the Fourth-- the four Raider battalions, there were only four Raider battalions, the four Raider battalions became the Fourth Regiment. And then we went to Guam as part of the First Provisional Brigade where we received the Naval Unit Citation. Guam was the First Provisional Brigade, we went to Okinawa as part of the Sixth Division. But we were still all basically Raider-trained men.

And it's true then that the Raiders achieved such fame that the football team--

Oh, the Oakland Raiders are named after us. .

Yes. How did that come to be or--

Well, what's his name, Ray, the owner?

Al Davis? Al Davis.

Al Davis was a Marine, not a Raider, but he must have just liked us, but, yes, the Oakland Raiders are named after us. They carried, well, our insignia is very similar to theirs on the helmet.

Oh, the skull, yes.

Yes.

Wow.

Yes. We had some great football players with us on our--

In addition to the guy from Notre Dame?

Oh, yes. Joe Andreko from Fordham, Al Bauman from Wisconsin, Dave Shriner. All killed, they were all killed. But great guys, yes, and a lot of other basketball players. We had some really great guys. Who was it? I wish I could think of a couple of others that really, really, no, but I can't think of them now.

Yes. Yes. So at this stage of the interview, we usually ask, the question that they recommend is how do you think your military service and experiences in the military affected your life?

Well, in the first place, the Marine Corps builds character. I mean, it's just an experience that you can't even explain. It's a feeling inside of you. It's you're proud but humble because of the opportunity to serve with the kind of men that you were with. Upchurch was seventeen years old when we hit the beach of Okinawa. He wasn't eighteen until April 14th. We hit April 1st. Can you imagine? And, don't forget, we were all twenty-one or under when we volunteered. I was only twenty at that time. I was an old man compared to some of them, you know. And how it, as far as it affected my life, I can only say that God has been very generous. That's all I can say.

Do you think your military experience influenced your thinking about war or about the military in general?

Probably so. A lot of things I would do differently than they're doing, you know. But I would, in the first place, people, they can't even imagine. I don't care what they see on television or what. You have to have been there, see the blood flowing out of your buddy's body, dripping all over you.

(telephone rings) Mariann. Yes, I'm in an interview here. Okay, sweetheart. Bye. My daughter. I always love her. She could cook when she was ten!

Wow.

My wife was a saint. Is a saint.

And then, your family, you still have family in the area, do you?

Seven of them in Des Plaines. One in Bensenville, who just moved to Bensenville from Des Plaines, and then two in Minnesota.

Yes.

In Minneapolis, but Pammy will fly down here for a birthday party. They're very close.

That's, my wife, their mother, in the picture(appears in Appendix). She took such great pride in her children, that's the only reason she hated to leave was because of them.

Yes.

So thinking back about your military experience, it's just that you'd agree with the statement it was probably like, was it, that I don't know who said it, was it Sherman who said that war is hell or something like that, that it is.

Well, it is, but, listen, you do what you have to do to, because this is your country.

Yes.

That's what burns me with people. Your country asks you to do something, you have to do it. I mean, they're not always right, but this is your duty. Patriotism has come back somewhat, but it was never what it was like at World War II.

That was incredible, not only from the standpoint of the boys and the men that served us, but the people at home. Like Marion worked for Admiral making radios and so forth for airplanes. And it was just a team operation. You had to have the people here.

Turning out the

Absolutely.

The matériel and munitions.

These were the guys that couldn't go in the Service. I give them credit for what they did here.

Yes.

There was a unity that you'd never imagine.

It was amazing that the United States could fight on two fronts and project power, and troops, and supplies.

That's my point. It takes cooperation. Teamwork all the way.

So is there any, at this point, is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered in the interview?

Just Father Redmond. We never mentioned Father Redmond.

Oh, Father Redmond. We wrote his name, yes. What about Father Redmond?

How could we forget Father Redmond?

Yes.

He was absolutely an inspiration, an example. Father would hold Mass on a tree stump in a jungle battlefield. He would give the last rites in a mortar barrage, machine gun fire, he didn't care what it was, he was going to give those last rites to those guys. He had to be, have some special care of some kind, because he was, again, I'm not saying we're, fear is so hard to describe, to say we were without fear, he and I both, isn't exactly right, I suppose. But it was, because there was tension and everything else, but you had that power of prayer that was so important. You just relied on the Lord's goodness and whatever he decided to do with you. I mean, there's just no way to explain it other than that.

So Father Redmond made it through the war okay?

He just died. Oh, he was ninety-something.

A grand age, yes.

Listen, when he was there, he was already like fifty, or something about. What a man he was! Rugged.

Where was he from? Chicago?

I don't know. I don't think so. I think he was more from the West Coast. And that's where he wound up. He was just an unbelievable man.

Well, on that note of admiration, I think that's a good point to end the interview.

Okay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vana, thank you.

It was my pleasure, and I'll tell you.

And did you also take bets as a kind of bookie while at sea?

I'll show them sometime and then, these guys, this is what they bet. This is what they owed me. And here's where I paid them out and so forth. It was really--

How did you learn how to run a bookie joint?

Well, I worked in a bookie.

Oh, did you? On the North Side?

At Adams and Wabash.

Yes. Did you bet the horses too?

We got two horses. I should have brought pictures with me. We owned two horses. It's called Always Faithful Stable after the Marine charge. Two of my Marine buddies, my son Timmy, and myself. I should have brought that stuff with me.

Can I-- can you leave this with me?

Oh, sure.

I'd like to take--

So this was at--

Here. Here. Here. Here.

This was in Japan?

That was in Japan on Okinawa. I mean on, remember, I told you, about the fifty-seven days aboard ship. When we got to the Marshalls, my dad sent me the sports sections of the *Tribune* over.

That was like gold.

Well, yes, but all he sent me was the race results, because they had the charts, you know, this horse by a quarter of a length and so forth and so on.

Yes.

So fifty-seven days aboard ship, it gets kind of boring. We played pinochle and everything else. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll start a book, and I put up sheets with the names of the horses on them. I had all the races here, you know, I put the names of the horses on. They could bet a nickel, or a dime, a quarter was as much as you could bet, a nickel was the minimum. And then I would announce the race. "By a half a length, Whirlaway comes on the outside."

Because you had heard, did you, you had heard races announced when you were in the bookies?

When I was in seventh grade, eighth grade, I did an announcing of the Kentucky Derby, you know, imaginary. I was only in the seventh grade at Palmer School.

You went to Palmer School?

Yes on Kenneth Avenue.

Yes. Yes.

That's where I graduated from, Palmer. And then, anyway, I probably should have gone into announcing!

Yes. You would have been a great announcer. Phil Gorgeff was a great announcer.

Oh, the best horse race announcer, you know, and he did some other stuff, too, but he was great. Timmy writes an article, I should have brought that along, for the *Illinois Racing News*. Oh, I've got to--I'll, next time--

Next time.

I see you. I'll bring that stuff with me. I'll bring that stuff with me.

Thanks for the the addendum on the booking--bookie--

Yes. Oh, I tell you, we had so much fun with that. Actually, when we left the Marshalls, we only had a week or so before we hit Okinawa, but the guys got the biggest bang out of that, Ill tell you!

Reader's Note:

Mr. Vana is already registered as a participant the Veterans History Project, having been videotaped. His existing collection profile appears on the next page.

The reader is encouraged to continue on to the Appendix to view scans of relevant photographs and memorabilia, a copy of the Raider Patch newsletter, honoring Richard Bush, and a copy of Senator's Dole's Resolution as well as two accounts of Mr. Vana's experiences on Okinawa, written by his fellow Marine Raider and lifelong friend, Stuart Upchurch.

*Maria
Dink*

Real Love stories have No Ending

*August 7,
1943*



Mr. and Mrs. Vana during war years





“X” marks Mr. Vana in above platoon shot, taken on Guadalcanal in late 1944 or early '45 after their return from Guam. They had previously gone through training on Guadalcanal. Mr. Vava's lifelong buddy, Mr. Upchurch who was only 17 years old is 3rd from the left in the third row. Platoon leader, Lt. Dick Baumhardt, who was 23, can be seen 6th from the left in the back row. Mr. Vana served as a pallbearer at Mr. Baumhardt's funeral in Centerville, Ohio, on February 21, 2009.

Scan of photograph taken during the interview of two Samurai swords taken by Mr. Vana during fighting on Okinawa. The dress sword in the middle was given to him in Japan by Dr. Matsamoto.



Stories of World War II hit close to home

Editor's note: There are countless stories of World War II. Here is one, a tale of two friends far from home. It is narrated by C. Stuart Upchurch, who lives in Raleigh, N.C., and it tells the story of a memorable day in his life and that of his close friend, Richard T. Vana of Des Plaines. Vana enlisted in the Marines at age 19 in 1943. He volunteered for the elite Marine Raiders (who were based on the famed British Commandos and later gave their name to the Oakland Raiders football team). In 1945, he found himself on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, training for the battle of Okinawa with the 4th Regiment toward the end of the Okinawa campaign, famous for its bloody, close-quarter fighting.

BY STUART UPCHURCH
Special to the Daily Herald

It was late in the campaign for Okinawa. The battle was being won, but it was taking its toll. Dick Vana and I were two of just a few who survived all 99 days of this crucial and bloody campaign. Vana was not the kind of Marine who could stand by while one of our platoon mates bled to death, so he prodded us both into a heroic act.

We were returning to Baker company. During the night Charlie company had asked for a fire team to plug a hole in its line, and we were nominated for what seemed like a mission impossible. It appeared that a counterattack was inevitable that night, and the position we

were assigned to fill was most vulnerable.

Fortunately for us, except for some occasional bursts from a Nambu and a few now-dead infiltrators, the anticipated attack did not materialize. Though war is hectic no matter where you are, we were glad to be returning to the "security" of our own company and platoon.

As we approached our area a mortar barrage began. Vana and I looked at each other. As we hadn't been with our squad during the night, we had no foxhole. The mortars were following in a helter-skelter fashion and left us with little chance but to dive in with two other men, boys actually, as none of us were out of our teens.

There's nothing you can do during a mortar attack but lie low and pray one of the deadly missiles doesn't drop in the hole with you.

As the vicious bombardment persisted, the call for corpsman could be heard up and down our lines.

Then — bam! One landed right in the hole of two green replacements, Red and Richey — cousins from the Boston area. A cloud of yellow smoke hung over their foxhole like a specter of death in a yellow robe.

Richey appeared out of the hole. "Help!" he cried out. Instantly, Vana shouted, "Uppy, we gotta go help them."

Now, I didn't want to leave the "safety" of the foxhole. I was



COURTESY OF RICHARD T. VANA

Richard Vana, second from right, with some of his Marine Raider pals in Yokosuka, Japan, where they were stationed for a few months in fall 1945 as part of the occupation force.

hoping to see someone else rush to their aid (those were the thoughts that flashed through my mind). But Vana, this time in a more demanding tone, said,

"Uppy, we gotta go."

All this took only a few seconds, but in combat it seemed

See WAR on PAGE 3

Scan of article appearing in Daily Herald,
November 14, 2003, page 3.

This stirring account of Marine bravery on Okinawa is a shorter version of Mr. Upchurch's 9-page statement of 4/1/89 which can be read further on in the Appendix.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2003

War: Marines risk lives to save fellow soldier

Continued from Page 1

pulled until the bleeding finally stopped. About that time, a corpsman from Charlie company showed up and jumped right in and began to administer plasma.

Meantime, Richey revived somewhat. "Vana, I'm cold," he whimpered. "Where's Red?" he cried quietly.

I told him not to worry, that Red was OK. "I'm cold," he whimpered again. Vana took his hand and asked, "Richey, can you repeat with me ... Vana started in prayer, "Our Father, who art in heaven ..."

Richey again asked, "Where's Red?" Vana continued to hold Richey's hand and pray. "Followed" be Thy name. Thy Kingdom, come, Thy will be done ...," and on to the prayer's conclusion.

"How are you feeling now, Richey?" Vana asked. "I'm getting warmer," was the reply, and that satisfied Vana. He knew what had made Richey warmer. Some could say it was the plasma, but Vana knew what had made him warmer brought him back from death, and it wasn't the plasma.

The stretcher bearers with a jeep showed up, and we took Richey outside. The mortar attack had ended. We lost four men from our platoon that day and most from our squad. Vana kept the faith and maybe I did, too, and maybe that's what saw us through.

Red, covered by a poncho, was carried to the rear of a jeep, but not the same one that carried his cousin. We heard later that Richey had lost that leg, but we'd saved his life, Vana and I. We never saw him again.

I wore those bloody dungarees for a week until I found a dead Marine, my size, who had been killed by a hit in the head. His clothes were cleaner than mine.

to me to be in slow motion. With a curse I jumped out of our foxhole and Vana with me. The shells kept dropping all around, but Vana and I had a mission and didn't give care to the explosions that seemed to follow our tracks. Funny how the fear I felt so strongly left so suddenly.

We ran up the little hill to where Red and Richey were. The yellow smoke still hung over the hole. Richey was trying to move, but Red lay still in the death. One arm was blown off, and there were many other wounds.

Richey was trying to talk but could only babble. Vana and I grabbed his arms and dragged him out of the hole and a short way down the hill. Now I could see he was bleeding profusely. There was no way Richey could be treated here.

I saw the mouth of a cave in the valley below so I picked Richey up and over my shoulder in a fireman's drag and headed for the cave, where I figured we could treat him in relative safety. Vana ran shotgun at my side.

Richey was hit in an artery in the upper thigh and was bleeding like a stuck hog. His blood ran down the back of my jacket onto my trousers to my ankle and on the front of my jacket to my waist.

The sanctuary of the cave was not too distant, but with mortar shells dropping all around us, it seemed miles away. There had to be a guardian angel protecting Vana and me as we neared for the cave's cover.

Once inside we went as deep into the cave as light permitted. This was a stand-up cave and obviously had been used for a first aid station. Bandages and plasma bottles were strewn about.

I gently laid Richey down on the ground. The first thing we did was to find the wound. Up next to the groin were three holes made by jagged shrapnel. The blood was pumping out with every heart beat, and we knew the bleeding had to be stopped. We found a plasma tube that we used as a tourniquet. Wrapping his thigh with it, we both



Mr. Vana's wife and their ten children,
then and recently before Mrs. Vana's passing.



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Richard Vana Collection

Biographical Information

Name:
Richard T. Vana
Date of Birth:
1923
Place of Birth:
Chicago, IL

Gender:
Male
Race:
White
Home State:
IL
War or Conflict:
World War II, 1939-1946

Status:
Veteran
Dates of Service:
1943-1946

Entrance into Service:
Enlisted

Branch of Service:
Marine Corps

Unit of Service:
1st Raider Battalion

Location of Service:
San Diego, California; New Caledonia; Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands); Guam (Mariana Islands); Okinawa Island (Ryukyu Islands); Japan

Highest Rank:
Corporal

Prisoner of War:
No

Service Related Injury:
Yes

Collection Information

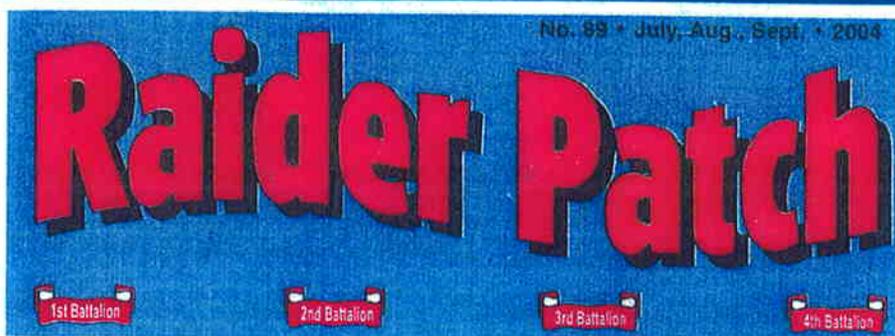
Type of Resource:
Video: VHS [1 item] --Oral history interview
Interviewer:
Paul R. Meincke
Donor:
Carl Marella
Donor Affiliation/Organization:
Boy Scout Troop 6
Collection #:
AFC/2001/001/37344
Subjects:
Vana, Richard
World War II, 1939-1946 -- Personal Narratives
United States. Marine Corps.
Cite as:
Richard Vana Collection (AFC/2001/001/37344),
Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center,
Library of Congress

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May 26, 2004

Need Help?
Contact Us

The Raider web site <http://www.usmarineraiders.org/index2.html> provides access to past and current issues of the Raider Patch newsletter. The front page of the tribute to Medal of Honor recipient, Richard Bush, can be seen below.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.usmarineraiders.org

★
A Tribute to
our last
MOH Recipient,
Dick Bush

★
Raider Hall
Dedication
at Quantico

★
One Day
Enlistment...
A Peace Time
Cruise

★
Bull Sheet
and more!



SEMPER FIDELIS TO THE CORPS RAIDER HERITAGE SECURED



— Patch Photo by George MacRae

USMRA President Chuck Meacham cuts the traditional ribbon proclaiming the opening of Raider Hall at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia. Assisting Meacham in the ceremony is General Allen. The state-of-the-art fitness and training center is named in honor of the four United States Marine Raider Battalions of World War II and will adequately serve the new "born-again Raiders" of the 21st Century. — Editor's Note: See Short Burst on page 3 for dedication speech by USMRA President Meacham.

QUANTICO AND WEST COAST HONOR RAIDER LEGACY

So much has happened lately concerning our Association that it's getting difficult to keep pace with. You will find numerous stories throughout this issue of your Patch that will attempt to keep you up to date on all that's going on.

Two very important events were the official naming of the all-new, state-of-the-art fitness and training center at Quantico, Raider Hall. Doesn't that have a great sound to it?

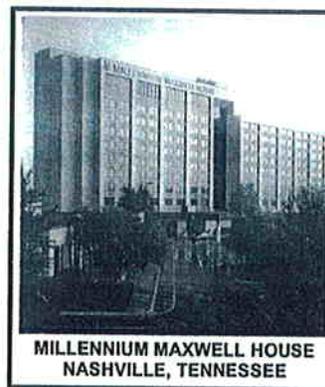
On the West Coast, down on San Diego's Coronado Island at the MCRC base of operations, there will very soon be a building named in honor of our own Sgt. Clyde Thomason, the Corps' first Medal of Honor awarded in World War II.

In addition, a memorial plaque to our Makin Island KIA's will be placed on the **USS MAKIN ISLAND (LHD-8)** prior to her christening and her joining the fleet. Lots going on... stay tuned!

2004 Raider Reunion Culminates An Eventful Year for Our Association.

The 2004 Raider Reunion was just about underway at press time for your Patch. We will have a complete wrap-up of the Nashville, TN get together in our 4th Qtr. issue. All indications were that our 2004 Reunion was all set and prepared to provide members with an outstanding and memorable reunion. A couple of things for sure, there are some great venues in Nashville and the surrounding area and the Association business will fill the menu. Most importantly for the general membership is the meeting, seeing and conversing with old friends and comrades.

Incidentally, if you took any photos at the Nashville Reunion, how about forwarding a few to the Patch? Please identify subjects and event, if possible. Thanks, Editor.



MILLENNIUM MAXWELL HOUSE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

A Special Tribute to a Special Raider

PRIDE OF THE RAIDER MARINES

MOH Holder, Richard Bush Dies

By John McCarthy, Patch Editor

It's always hard to receive news that another Raider has left us via attrition. As your Patch Editor, I'm usually one of the first to receive news of the passing of one of our members.

Especially one who brought such pride and honor to our Association. He was a member that your Editor was especially very fond of. He was the Raiders last surviving Medal of Honor recipient to pass away. He was Richard Earl Bush, 2D and 4HQ from Waukegan, Illinois.

Most members of our association are aware of how Dick won, if that's the right word, his Medal of Honor. If not, I have included a copy of his official citation under the magnificent photo of him with his Medal of Honor proudly around his neck.

As we had already gone to press with your last issue of the Patch when I received word that Dick Bush had died, I had to quickly remake a page and get a small obituary inserted so readers didn't have to wait three months for this small tribute to a great American. I promised to do a detailed story on Dick in our next issue of the Patch. This is that promise kept. During our annual reunion in Washington, D.C. in 2001 that we had intentionally timed to coincide with the Full Honors Burial of our Makin KIA's at Arlington National Cemetery, I had the opportunity to "corner" Dick Bush for an extended interview. We didn't talk about war time heroics, his wounds, or his medals. I was sure he had had enough of that over the years.

To pictorially complete my potential story on some of the humorous and interesting stories and antidotes (ones that he was known for) that he told during that interview, he quickly mailed me copies of several photos that illustrated the subject matter. Some are included in this tribute to him.

As can be imagined, Richard Earl Bush was privy to the company of many important people in very high places. Naturally his ownership of our

RICHARD E. BUSH • 1924 ~2004



— EDITOR'S COLLECTION

This is a magnificent photo of "Our Hero", Richard Earl Bush, better known to his Raider comrades as Dick. He was the genuine article.

Medal of Honor Citation

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a Squad Leader serving with the First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Sixth Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese Forces, during the final assault against Mount Yaetake on Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, 16 April 1954. Rallying his men forward with indomitable determination, Corporal Bush boldly defied the slashing fury of concentrated Japanese artillery fire pouring down from the gun-studded mountain fortress to lead his squad up the face of the rocky precipice, sweep over the ridge, and drive the defending troops from their deeply entrenched position. With his unit, the first to break through to the inner defense of Mount Yaetake, he fought relentlessly in the forefront of the action until seriously wounded and evacuated with others under protecting rocks. Although prostrate under medical treatment when a Japanese hand grenade landed in the midst of the group, Corporal Bush, alert and courageous in extremity as in battle, unhesitatingly pulled the deadly missile to himself and absorbed the shattering violence of the exploding charge in his own body, thereby saving his fellow Marines from severe injury or death despite the certain peril to his own life. By his valiant leadership and aggressive tactics in the face of savage opposition, Corporal Bush contributed materially to the success of the sustained drive toward the conquest of this fiercely defended outpost of the Japanese Empire. His constant concern for the welfare of his men, his resolute spirit of self-sacrifice, and his unwavering devotion to duty throughout the bitter conflict enhance and sustain the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Nation's highest award for valor opened many doors and a lot of people wanted his company. Most of them found out he was really a very special person with a great sense of humor.

One question I put to him was, of all the "big shots" he had close relationships with, who was his "favorite?" He replied, "Harry Truman always gave me good advice. He once asked me how many times I have to get hit on the head before I find out what is hitting me on the head."

"When Admiral Nimitz returned from overseas on 5 October, 1945, and landed at the Naval Air Station at Bethesda, Maryland, I was waiting for him at the White House. He was due at the White House at 10:00 a.m. I wanted to go meet Nimitz when he landed but Truman said, "No, let him come to us." Truman had only been President for six months but he learned this early and used it again when he met MacArthur at Wake Island during the Korean War. MacArthur kept circling the field at Wake, waiting for Truman to land first. Truman said, "Look at that -- he keeps circling the field waiting for me to land first. He wants me to be there to greet him!" Truman told his pilot to call that plane and tell that son-of-a-bitch to get that plane on the ground." We both agreed that he was some kind of Commander-In-Chief!



— EDITOR'S COLLECTION

This photo was taken the day I interviewed Dick Bush during our Washington, D.C. / Arlington Makin Raider KIA Services in August, 2001. He was a most pleasant and accommodating person. We'll all miss him.



Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2007

Senate

HONORING HEROIC MARINES

Mrs. DOLE Madam President, it is with great honor that I rise today in order to recognize the heroism of Marine PFC C. Stuart Upchurch, Sr., and Marine Cpl Richard E. Vana.

The Battle of Okinawa, fought on the Japanese island of Okinawa, was the largest amphibious assault during the Pacific Campaigns of World War II. The battle lasted from late March through June 1945, and was the last major campaign of the War in the Pacific. The battle has been referred to as the "Typhoon of Steel" in English, and *tetsu no ame*--"Rain of Steel"--in Japanese. These nicknames refer to the ferocity of the fighting, the intensity of gunfire, and sheer numbers of Allied ships and armored vehicles that assaulted the island. More ships were used, troops put ashore, supplies transported, bombs dropped, and naval guns fired against shore targets than any other operation in the Pacific.

There were over 72,000 United States casualties at Okinawa, of which 12,513 were killed or missing.

In the last days of the Battle for Okinawa, PFC C. Stuart Upchurch, Sr., and Cpl Richard E. Vana were marines assigned to the 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, Baker Company, 4th Regiment, 6th Marine Division.

On or about June 1, 1945, Baker Company came under heavy Japanese mortar fire. Corporal Vana and Private First Class Upchurch were on the way back to their unit, having filled in at Charlie Company's defensive line the night before. With no foxhole of their own, Vana and Upchurch jumped

into the first position they could find, sharing the foxhole with a new lieutenant and another marine.

When a nearby foxhole was struck by enemy mortar fire, a marine manning the position could be heard crying for help. Under the onslaught of constant enemy fire, and with complete disregard for their own well being, Vana and Upchurch ran up the hill to assist the marines. Inside the foxhole that took a direct hit, they found "Red" and Richey, cousins from the Boston area. "Red" had been fatally wounded and Richey was seriously injured. Richey was suffering from a life threatening arterial wound to the upper thigh.

Still under the barrage of Japanese mortars, Vana and Upchurch proceeded to drag Richey out of the foxhole and down the hill. Upchurch then carried the marine while Vana provided protective cover. They made way for a cave which was being used as an aid station. Inside the cave, Vana and Upchurch provided critical lifesaving first-aid until a corpsman was able to assist.

Without the selfless and courageous actions of Vana and Upchurch, Richey would have perished from his severe wounds. Their actions exemplify the Marine Corps motto "Semper Fidelis," meaning "Always Faithful."

PFC C. Stuart Upchurch, Sr., and Cpl Richard E. Vana's gallant actions in close contact with the enemy, and unyielding courage and bravery, are in the highest traditions of military service, and reflect great credit upon themselves, their unit, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the United States of America.

Elizabeth Dole

April 1, 1989

It's getting late now. The battle for Okinawa was being won, no doubt, but it was taking a toll. Third Platoon, Baker Company was getting smaller. The following is a story about two young Marines who saw their duty and did it. Richard Vana, a very religious youngster, and my very good friend, lives today in Chicago, the father of ten children. Dick was not the kind of a guy who could sit in relative safety while one of our fellow platoon mates bled to death. So he prodded us both into a heroic act.

Charlie Company, our battalion mate, asked for a fire team from Baker Company to fill in a space in their lines. The request seemed a little crazy. Why would they have a gap in their lines that needed only a fire team to cover? And why would our Co Commander acquiesce to such a request? But, they did and he did and so Vana and I and two other guys left our platoon and went to Charlie Co. It wasn't very far, but we didn't like leaving the security of our own guys. That's the way I felt anyhow. Sorta like leaving home. When we arrived some sergeant showed us where to dig in. It was an area that was completely exposed to the front and while we were looking at the location, a burst of Nambu fire raked the ground right where we were to dig in. Then we knew why they had sent for us. They didn't want to commit any of their guys to this danger. So the Charlie Co Sergeant suggested we wait til dark before digging in. What the hell did he suppose we were going to do? We walked down the back of the hill we were going to defend to wait for darkness.

Darkness came as it always does. We took off and left our packs at the backside of the hill we were to defend. No need to be encumbered with the clumsy packs. It was going to be rough enough without carrying that inevitable burden. We waited until after real dark had set in. The Nambu operator had not fired in our direction again. This gave some hope that we might not be killed by him. Some automatic weapons can be set on a target or set just to point toward the front. They can be locked in almost any position so that the gunner has only to touch the trigger for a burst of 30 Cal. to go winging directly to where the automatic weapon is pointing. If this were to be the case of this Nambu, all the Nip had to do was pull the trigger and wipe all of us out who had dug in where the gun was last pointed. This knowledge didn't make our stay at Charlie Co any more pleasant. The guys we met at Charlie Co were nice enough and friendly. But, why not? We were going to take some heat off them by filling in their lines. One of the guys we met was a Pollock from Pennsylvania. This very friendly guy was a giant. He wasn't very tall, but he was wide! He must have weighed over 200 lbs. He had arms like my calves. He had no belly and his shoulders were as wide as the Grand Canyon. He had

the hole that adjoined us in our suicide mission.

Vana and I have talked about this: Why did we take these orders so obediently? Why didn't we see that the position we were to take was impossible? Why didn't we just tell some Sergeant to go f--k himself. What could they have done to us? But, we didn't. We were so well trained that we wanted to do whatever was asked. It was what kept us on the front lines. I personally don't think it was training. Marine Corps training, that is. I think it was loyalty to the guys. Letting them down was unthinkable. Now this may have been what training is all about. I guess we'll never know. Anyhow here we were and we were doing what we were told to do. Dig in amongst Charlies Co's line and protect it. The darkness gave us cover and we quietly dug in. This time Vana and I were fox hole buddies. After Livengood had been hit and left, it was a pleasure to spend the night in a hole with a guy who could be trusted. The digging in took longer than it should as we were trying to be quiet. The noise of a shovel hitting rocks was a dead giveaway that some digging was going on. We settled in and spent a rather uneventful night. The attack that was expected didn't materialize. That suited me. Sometime during the night Vana and I heard some noise to our left. It must have been the hole of the giant Polack, but we couldn't tell for sure. All we knew was that it was not in the front. We both held grenades but didn't throw any, because grenades were to be thrown only in the front. This commotion was coming from our left and we knew anything over there could be handled by the giant. The noise that was so confusing was some grunting, like someone was trying to breathe and couldn't. The other noise was someone cussing, "What're doing ya little son of a bitch!". The only reply was the wheezing breathing. Then there was the sound of a heavy weapon going off. It sounded like a 45, but you couldn't be sure. There was some more scuffling, and then silence.

As soon as daylight began to show Vana and I and the other two guys left our foxholes, glad that the Nambu hadn't fired all night. We wanted to leave the spot before the Nip gunner woke up and saw us as a target he could easily hit. Maybe he slept late or maybe he left during the night, either way we left so as not to tempt 'em. We moved on down the backside of the hill where we left our packs. As we passed the giant polock who was just waking up we noticed a little dead Nip near his hole. The little Nip had been shot right between his eyes. The round took most of his head off. It seems that during the night, this little Nip whom we had passed over came out of hiding. He approached our lines from the rear. He either was stupid or 'very hungry, for he had open and riffled all four of our packs. I don't think anything was missing, maybe just some rations. Then for some unexplained reason he crawled right into the hole with the giant Polock. That's what the cussing was

all about. The Pennsylvania native wasn't about to share his hole with some little scrawny Nip soldier. The little Nip made a poor choice. Of all the holes he could have chosen this one was the worst. When the giant realized what was happening he grabbed the little Nip by the throat with one hand while the other held the 45 cal. pistol. The giant's thumb squeezing the little Nips' Adam's apple was what had made the wheezing we heard. When the giant grew tired of squeezing he put the 45 right against the Nip's forehead and pulled the trigger. Then the giant threw what remained as far out of his hole as possible. Seeing dead Nip soldiers was nothing new to us, but seeing one that had his head blown apart with a short range 45 was a little different, so we looked. The giant made little of this drama. It was just day to day combat life as far as he was concerned. He seemed more interested in eating the can of chicken with rice he had opened. The fact that the Nip's head was scattered all over the ground didn't faze him one bit. With a mouth full of ration, he grinned for the first time and said, "Can you believe that little bastard, climbing in my hole?" "Shit!" And back to his eating. I'm glad he was on our side. Some Charlie Company Sergeant came by and said we were dismissed and could return to our Co area. He said he appreciated the help and was glad we had not been needed. We repacked our packs that the little Nip had rifled, saddled up and moved out with no idea of the drama we were about to become involved in.

As we approached our area a small mortar attack began. Vana and I looked at each other. We hadn't spent the night here and did not have a foxhole. The little mortars were falling in a helter skelter pattern so it was hard to predict where the next one was going to land. The two guys with us took off back to their squad, while we looked for ours. There was a hole right in front of us that was occupied by Brennen and some replacement we didn't know. We rushed over and climbed in without an invitation. The damn mortars were landing all round us now. One thing about this hole was that it was dug under a tree. The call for "Corpsman" was being heard all up and down the line. During a mortar attack one place you didn't want to be was under a tree. These deadly little grenade sized mortars exploded on contact and a tree limb over your head could produce devastating results. But, here we were and that crazy Brennen was up on his knees with a pair of field glasses looking for of all things the gunner or the spotter. Of course this only caused the spotter to see him and direct his attack to our part of the line. This wasn't the first time Brennen had done this. The last time he called attention to our part of the line in a mortar attack, Lt. Baumhardt and others had been hit. Brennen was older than most of us, he was a draftee, a loud mouthed Irishman, and wasn't liked by most of us younger guys. Jesus!, we couldn't help it if we were young! Brennen was scanning the country side and the mortars were getting

closer. After Vana and I left a shell landed close enough to him to give him a few wounds in his back. That took him out and we didn't see him again until we all arrived on Guam. Suited me OK. Had we been there that same grenade would have gotten us too.

There's just no way to accurately describe what its like being in a mortar attack. If a rifle is shooting at you, you can take cover, maybe. If a mortar gun is shooting, lobbing their deadly little grenades from the sky there is no protection except a cave. Caves were not always available and besides you had the responsibility of your place on the line. To leave your place in the line and thus make a "hole" in the line was unthinkable. This could endanger any number of guys who were counting on the line being filled. A hole or gap in the line could let the enemy move through and encircle the unprotected flank. Leaving your place in the line was just not done. But, the temptation was there. Somehow it just seemed stupid to sit there and let these little missiles of death fall at their discretion, but that's what has happened in all wars since this type of gun was invented. You could liken it to two lines of men facing each other with shields and swords marching toward each other knowing full well that wounded was the least you were going to get. Mutilation and death more likely. But, march they did and die they did. The same under a mortar or artillery attack. Will anyone ever be able to understand or even explain the actions and thinking of man?

There we sat biting our lips, straining with all our strength to stop the mortars from falling. Brennen still looking through those f--k--g field glasses. The pattern of fire was changing. It was moving toward our part of the lines. I knew it was that the spotter had seen Brennen with the field glasses. Thinking that Brennen was an officer, he provided a tempting target. The only thing wrong was Vana and I were now foxhole mates with this crazy Irishman. But, all we could do was strain and try to get deeper in the hole. We had forgotten about the tree for now. But, it was still there and the shells were landing closer and closer. It was beginning to look as if this Nip gunner knew how to handle a Knee-mortar. It, also, looked like he had inexhaustible supply of ammo. What's so bad about this kind of attack is that there's nothing anybody can do. All you can do is sit, pray and wait for it to end. If it ended your life before the attack ended, so be it. I don't mean to be callous about this, but that's the facts. Officer or enlisted man friend or enemy, there's nothing that can be done. All you can do is scrunch deeper into the hole and hope. One evening under a large artillery attack - not just knee mortars- but 3 inchers and the lot, Livengood and I were in a deep hole hugging each other like lovers. I don't know which of us was shaking the most. As I look back on the scene with older and more peaceful eyes, I realize just how pitiful our situation

was. Eighteen and nineteen year old boys lying in the dirt knowing full well that in just a minute your're going to die. SHAME! on the politicians who put us in that plight.

A few more shells fell near by and then, BLAM! one landed right in the hole of the guys next to us. They were far enough away that the shrapnel didn't reach us or the two guys there absorbed it all. In any event, Vana and I both looked in the direction of the hole occupied by two cousins - Red and Richey. And this was all we knew of their names - Red and Richey. We knew they were cousins, they had told us. They were both from the Boston area, there was no mistaking the accent in their brogue. As it was with most replacements we didn't pay a lot of attention to them. They were so strange to us that they kept mostly to themselves. Bruzas, the squad leader, paired them off as nobody else wanted to be foxhole buddies with either of them. And in combat, nobody ordered you around much. If you said you didn't want so and so for a fox hole buddy, that was that. The sergeants sorta figured it was really your life and you had a right to protect it. If I'd been ordered to I would've stayed in a hole with either or both, but I wouldn't have slept because I wouldn't have trusted either. During most nights you could hear Red and Richey talking. A thing most of us tried to avoid. You never knew when some crazy Nip was sliding around on his belly just looking for a foxhole to throw a grenade into. So the line at night was mostly quiet. The only thing that usually broke the silence was an occasional grenade being tossed by a nervous Marine who thought he heard something. Oft times the grenade found a target. Sometimes a wounded Nip would scream. Other times they would at least grunt. This response would call for other grenades until the grunting or screaming ended. There was no mercy. Bruzas usually would put Red and Richey off to themselves as much as the terrain would allow. That way if they attracted any attack it might not kill the rest of us. Typically it was like this: "Red!", "What?", Richey would always reply. "Did you hear that?", Red would always ask. "What?" would be the dim-witted reply of Richey. "There's a f--k--g Jap out there", would come the answer. "Where?", "Out there!" would always come the reply. All this would be done in a stage whisper that could be heard

up and down the line. And, of course, any marauding Nip would hear too. "Where's the f--k--g grenades?", one would ask of the other. "They're right here" and you could hear the rattle of the stiff ponchos as both scrambled to find their grenades.

We all sat deeper in our holes for fear they might forget where the front was and throw the grenades at one of us. It's happened before. "They were right here before dark", one of them would lambaste the other for not putting the grenades in easy reach. Most of more frightened folks would place our grenades on the backside of the front parapet so that just a stretching of the arm brought you into contact with these deadly

little peace-makers. But Red and Richey always had a hard time finding their grenades. Most of the time we were glad. It lessened the likelihood of them throwing one at us. By the time they found their grenades any Nip who might have been present would have made his move. As Red and Richey talked remarks such as: "Knock it the f--k off, you guys!", a hoarse whisper would come down the line. "What?", would come a reply from the cousins. "Knock it off!", again would come the order. "Red!", Richey would ask. "Did you hear that?". "What?", and they would start up all over again. It really got to be a problem. It was like putting a spotlight on our part of the line and we didn't like it. We "old men" (the ones who had been there the whole time) knew how a defensive line was to be conducted at night and we didn't want some new useless almost civilians replacements to come in and make life even more miserable than it already was.

Replacements were a problem. They were certainly necessary or we would have been rendered useless as a military threat to the enemy. We took casualties and they had to be replaced. But the replacements were usually civilians just out of boot camp and with very little or no training. The US was scraping the bottom of the barrel late in May, 1945. Those of us who were intent on surviving didn't have the time to take care of stupid civilians who got caught up in this senseless battle. The replacements, for the most part, had to take care of themselves. They were thought of by most of us as a pitiful lot who were doomed. We older guys tried not to get close to the replacements. We didn't need any more emotional involvement than we were already carrying. It was "tough shit" but that's the way it was. Red and Richey were so stupid and unprepared for life as a combat Marine, that they were considered as untrainable. And in combat nobody had the time to train them anyhow. They just had to make out the best they could, on their own.

Blam! went the mortar shell in their hole. Vana and I looked in their direction. A most pitiful sight met our gaze. A cloud of yellow smoke hung over the hole like some specter of death in a yellow robe. Richey's head appeared up out of the hole in the smoke. His helmet still on his head, dressed like a Marine in green dungarees that were still new. He looked just like what he was not. A Marine! Now he was a badly wounded young boy. "Help!", was all he cried. "Help!" and his head went back down in the hole. It makes me cry today just reliving the scene. His and Red's demise was inevitable. I don't know how we knew but we knew. Some guys you could tell were destined to be hit. Call it intuition or whatever, it was there.

"Uppy!", Vana said, "We got to go help 'em." Now I didn't want to leave the safety of the hole we shared with Brennen and the other guy. I was hoping to see someone else rush to their aid,

but nobody did. We weren't the only ones to see the yellow smoke. We weren't the only ones who heard the cry for help. That stupid Brennen, playing hero, was still looking out of his field glasses. It was like the glasses made him deaf. He heard the cry, but didn't move. His mission of having the attack directed toward us was too important to stop to help some wounded comrade. "Uppy!, we gotta go", Vana sorta cried. Vana clearly saw our duty and he needed me to help him. I really didn't want to leave the hole, but he insisted. All this only took a few seconds, but in combat everything seems to take on a slow motion and many thoughts could be experienced in a very short time. With a kind of curse I jumped out of the hole and headed for Richey, Vana right behind me. The shells kept dropping all around, but now Vana and I had a mission and didn't give a shit about the shells. Funny how your fear can be so strong and leave so suddenly. We climbed up the little hill to where Red and Richey's hole was. The yellow smoke still hung over the two boys. Richey was trying to move, but Red lay still in death. Red's arm had been blown off and he obviously had numerous other wounds. He had been killed instantly. Richey was trying to talk and was only babbling. I knew we could not stay there to treat him so Vana and I grabbed his arms and drug him bodily out of the foxhole and started down the hill. Richey's helmet slip down over his face and it drug in the dirt keeping his face out of the dirt. But his helmet strap was fastened and it was choking him. Not taking time to undo his strap I reached down and picked the little guy up in a "fireman's drag" over my shoulder and took off. The shells were still dropping, but now being occupied I couldn't tell for sure exactly where they were hitting. Now I didn't care. I had a plan. I saw the mouth of a cave in the little valley and I headed for it. My motive was two-fold. We could treat Richey there and take ourselves to safety. Richey was hit in an artery in the upper thigh, but we didn't know it at the time. He was bleeding "Like a stuck hog". His blood ran down the back of my dungaree jacket onto the trouser to my ankle. On the front of my jacket it just ran to my waist. In running toward the sanctuary of the cave we passed by the Company CP. The First Sergeant saw me and put Richey and me both down as wounded. It took a long time to get the record changed.

This was a "stand up" cave and had been used as an aid station sometime in the recent past. There were used bandages and plasma bottles everywhere. Apparently this area had been hotly contested before we arrived. I took Richey as deep into the cave as light permitted and gently laid him on the ground. The first thing we did was to find the wounds. Til then we hadn't noticed where the blood was coming from. It didn't take long to discover the nickel sized holes in his pants leg. Up near the groin were three holes made by the jagged shrapnel, one of them clearly in an artery. The blood was pumping out with every heart beat. Young and untrained as we were we knew the

bleeding had to be stopped. We quickly stripped off his pants, he was making little babbling sounds, but we were on a one-way street, we HAD to stop the bleeding! Looking around the cave we found the only thing that would make a tourniquet. It was the tube used to feed plasma. We wrapped his thigh with this tube and both of us pulled. The bleeding slowed but it didn't stop. We pulled harder afraid the tube would break, but it didn't. The bleeding slowed even more. Now we both put our knees up against his thigh and pulled with all our strength. By God! the bleeding stopped. We held our position until it really stopped. The tube cut into the fleshy part of Richey's leg. I thought we would pinch his leg off. About that time a corpsman from Charlie Co showed up. Charlie Co had not be subjected to the same attack and we had so many casualties that we had to borrow some corpsman from them. This guy jumped right into the picture and prepared to administer some plasma. In his haste he dropped the container of blood and it broke on the rocky floor of the cave. Cursing himself he finally was able to get the plasma flowing into Richey. Meantime Richey revived somewhat. "Vana, I'm cold", he whimpered. "Where's Red?" he asked in a moment of lucidity. "Where's Red"?, he cried quietly. They were never separated and like a child who cried for his mother Richey was looking for his security. "Red's OK", I said. "But where is he, I'm cold Vana", he insisted. The Plasma was flowing good now and some of his color was coming back. "I'm cold", he whimpered again. Vana took his hand in his and asked, "Richey can you repeat with me?" "Huh?" was the reply. He didn't understand what Vana was trying to say.

Vana started: "Our Father, who art in Heaven"
Richey looked a little wild eyed.

"Where's Red?"

"Hallowed be Thy name"

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done"

"On earth as it is in Heaven"

Vana held Richey's hand
and continued:

"Give us this day, our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses as
as we forgive those that trespass
against us."

"Lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil, for thine
is the kingdom and the power and
the Glory, forever and ever"

"Amen"

"How you feeling now Richey?" Vana asked. "I'm getting warmer", was the reply and that satisfied Vana. He knew what had made Richey warmer. Some could say the plasma, but Vana KNEW what had made him warmer - brought him back from death and it wasn't

the plasma.

The stretcher bearers with a jeep showed up and when we took Richey outside the mortar attack had ended. It was then we learned that Brennen and the replacement had both been hit when the mortar gunner finally killed that " officer " with the fieldglasses.

We lost four men from our platoon that day and mostly from my squad.

Vana kept the faith and maybe I did too and maybe that's what saw us through.

Red, covered by a poncho, was carried to the rear on a jeep, but not the same one that carried his cousin. Thus began their separation that would be forever.

We heard later that Richey had lost that leg, but, we'd saved his life, Vana and I. We never saw him again

I wore those bloody dungarees for a week until I found a dead Marine, my size, who had been killed by a hit in the head. His clothes were cleaner than mine.....

C. Stuart Upchurch, Sr.
PFC USMCR
'44 - '51

' A HAPPENIN'

Startled by what had just happened, the two young warriors stared at each other. The Jap Nambu had fired a burst in their direction. And when a Nambu fires a burst its almost always 6 to 8 rounds. 6 to 8 rounds of 30 calibered death winging in your direction is not pleasant. We'd lost a lot of guys to Nambus and had learned to fear and respect them.

The time was May, 1945 and the place was on some contested ground just below Sugar Loaf Hill looking toward the next objective - Naha, the capital city of Okinawa. World War II was winding down, but our war was just going on and on.

Paul stared at Uppy, his brown Italian eyes wide with fear and the unspoken knowledge that he had been hit. The rounds had landed in the dirt of the little hill Paul was lying on and Uppy was ducking down behind. Digging tonights foxhole had Uppy bent over so he was protected from the burst. Just some loose dirt flew into his eyes.

"Uppy, I'm hit!", was the plaintive sound that finally escaped Paul's mouth. Nothing else, no cry, no scream. Just resignation. In this type of situation everybody expected to be hit, sooner or later. Almost everybody had been hit, already. The platoon was so filled with replacements that we older guys didn't even know the names of some.

I looked at Paul, his face just about on the same level with mine when I raised up to see just what had happened. He was sort of frozen, maybe afraid to move for fear the Nambu operator might decide on another burst. I knew he couldn't stay where he was, obviously exposed to the whims of the Nambu. I reached up and grabbed him by the shoulders of his jacket and pulled. I pulled him down to where he was protected from the front. I gave the tradition call, "Corpsman!", and since this was not a full fledged fire-fight he came right away and in short order had Paul wrapped up for the trip back to the aid station.

'Happenin'.....

II

The Nambu fired one more burst before turning his attention to other Marines he happened to find within his sights. Paul was able to walk out without assistance and this was a good sign that he was not in any shock. Even at the tender age of 18 war experiences had taught a lot about the different aspects of wounds and what reaction to expect. For instance anyone about to die instinctively knew it and most called for "Mama". The plaintive cry, "MaMa!" was one of the worst sounds on the battlefield. People who called "Mama" did not survive.

And now in May, 1987 Paul and I once again stood on Okinawan soil. This time it was on the balcony of the Okinawan Sheraton Hotel. We stood, quietly - now old men - with our own thoughts overlooking the very valley where the drama of his being wounded took place. The houses, the buildings, the six lane highways obscured any chance of finding the spot where all this took place. And, that's better. We didn't need to see the spot where both of us almost lost our young lives. On the same day Paul was hit, in that same spot, we lost six guys from our platoon most of them from our squad. One man lost his leg, some lost their lives. One took a direct hit from an artillery shell and his flesh and blood covered the nearest 3 men. All we ever found was a bit of leg and hip. He had to be listed as "Missing in action" because there was not enough of him to identify. The faces of these young adventurers almost gone from our memory banks now. Forty-two years have passed. Unbelievable! forth-two years! More unbelievable was the fact that we were back here. Some memories will never leave. Like that same night when Paul was hit - in the same spot - a very young Japanese soldier trying to regain his lines came upon me sleeping in a water filled foxhole. He stood over me and threw a hand grenade into the hole of our squad members who were in another hole on guard. They committed two unpardonable sins: they were talking and not looking toward the rear. The little Jap armed only with the grenade and a bamboo stick, threw the grenade into their hole creating havoc! When I heard the noise I thought another artillery shell had come in.

'Happenin'....

III

In a half-asleep daze, when I heard the two men crying, I began to get up to go help them. As soon as I moved the little Jap knew I was awake and he hit me with his stick. When I recovered from the shock of being attacked on a personal basis, I grabbed the MI rifle that was always near by and with one shot killed the little soldier. He died without a sound. It was in the light of day that he appeared to be much younger than me.

At the time of these manly acts Paul was 20 and I was just 18. The little Jap looked to be about 15 or 16 at the very most. Most Westerners don't know that in the Japanese culture a baby is one year old at the instance of his birth.

Paul and I had returned to Okinawa to attend the dedication of a memorial that has just been erected on a spot called the " Garden of Remembrance ". The monument is a three-sided spire and each side is dedicated to the different people who died in the battle for Okinawa. One side is for the Americans, one is for the Japanese, and one is for the Okinawan civilians. The Okinawans who suffered the loss of 150,000 civilians only crime was of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. As it is in all wars, the soldiers are paid to fight and die, but the hapless island people were total victims. Never did I see one with a weapon.

We are told this is the first time that two enemies have come together to erect a single memorial to their common loss and suffering.

There were speeches of condolences for all three peoples who felt losses. Fifty-two old men Marines represented the 6th and the 1st Marines Divisions who fought the battle for Okinawa. Fifty to sixty Japanese veterans attended the ceremony. We did not sit together. Maybe it was too hard for all concerned.

A banquet was held that night in one of the new Okinawan hotels. The Americans, Japanese and Okinawans dined and drank together like the old friends they were trying to be .

'Happenin'.....

IV

While eating and drinking with new friends, I had a thought, "It is better to eat together than to fight each other".

The young warriors of today will have little understanding or patience for what took place this day on Okinawa. The old warriors having shed the blood of youth, will nod the understanding nod of time gone by.

C. Stuart Upchurch
USMCR '44 - '51

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