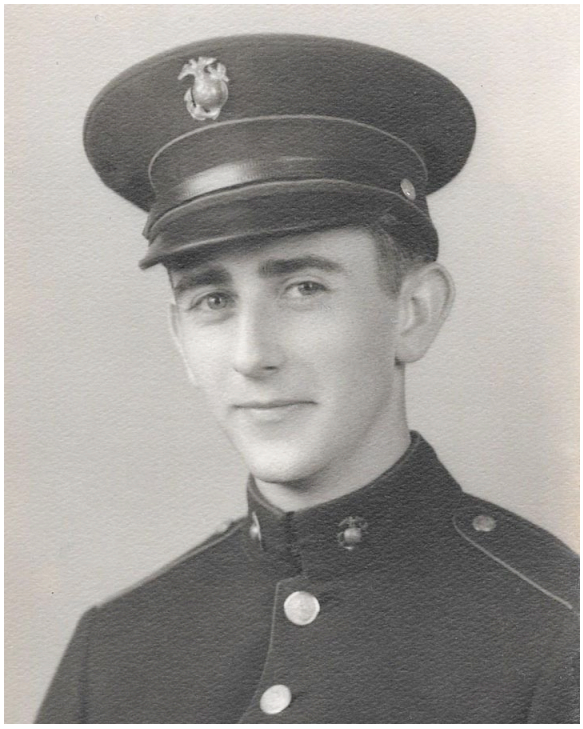
Albert W. Brown
President
(1965-1981)



U. S. Marine Corps
WWII
1942-1945

Memories of World War II

(April 2014)

I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in the spring of 1942. This gave me an opportunity to experience Parris Island in the summer. Parris Island, at that time, was generally as it had been in World War I. After the rifle range, we occupied barracks that apparently had not been used since WWI. The cockroaches were fully-grown!

There were still a few Marine legends among the senior NCOs. They were legends from World War I, China and the Caribbean with hash marks up to their shoulders. They were truly professionals. Boot camp was under traditional regulations with everyone a volunteer. Midnight rifle inspections attired in field boots, skivvy shorts, cartridge belts, rifles and bayonets were not uncommon. Mosquitoes enjoyed their midnight feast.

I believe there were 39 in the platoon when we finished training. Eleven of the platoon, picked alphabetically, went directly into infantry units preparing for the invasion of Guadalcanal. The rest of us went to North Carolina bases under construction. In a few weeks, a number of us were assigned to Jacksonville Naval Air



Al's mother stands in front of him.

Station Aviation School to become mechanics and other service personnel. A half dozen or so of us volunteered into gunnery school at Hollywood, Florida. I believe my incentive was partially the extra hazardous duty pay. My father had suffered a debilitating stroke when I was eight. There were no health or financial or medical safety nets in those days. I sent home a portion of my pay.

Upon finishing gunnery school, I was assigned to the naval base at Sanford, Florida, which I believe is now part of Disney World. I spent hours between twin 50's in the top turret of a light bomber. After about three months, I left for the West Coast to become part of Marine Base Defense Group 42. We went to Santa Barbara. It is a little-known fact that Japanese submarines shelled and set fire to the oilfield near that city. Santa Barbara duty was the finest a service person could ever experience.

The natives were very concerned about Japanese invasion. They appeared to feel secure as we installed some gun emplacements and patrolled the beach.

I was assigned to a newly created fighter attack squadron with Joe Foss the commanding officer. He was an outstanding leader. He remained with us until he was evacuated from the South Pacific with disabling malaria.

The University of California at Santa Barbara enrolled approximately 900 students, almost all of whom were female. The students also welcomed our presence. Several, including myself, eventually married persons met at Santa Barbara.

After a few months, an apparently ungrateful nation sent us into the South Pacific. Japanese submarines were plentiful. We finally left North Island without escort in a converted ship with about 250 Marines and lots of ammunition and fuel. Among the memories I believe stayed with many of us was watching San Diego fade beneath the evening horizon. We knew there was a tremendous amount of Pacific ahead.

One moonlit night near Johnson Island, we passed alongside a surfaced Japanese submarine with its naked crew busily washing clothing on the moonlit deck. It was the first time we heard "All hands man your battle stations. This is not a drill. " We used evasive tactics the rest of the night. I suspect the Japanese resurfaced and looked for their clothes which were left floating in the sea as the submarine submerged.

After about 30 days, we reached Espirito Santo. After re-supply, we went north to Guadalcanal, Bougainville and the Northern Solomon Islands. Things were relatively calm. We then skipped approximately 650 miles north of our last base on Green Island to the Bismarck Arch Archipelago. Off New Ireland, I rode out a typhoon on an LST. It was very interesting as it twisted in the heavy weather. You could hear the rivets pop. We went a few days before the galley was reopened. We lost contact with the escort vessels and landed on Emireau. This was the island where "bring them back alive Bailey" collected many reptiles in the 30's. A few Seventh Day Adventist missionaries from Australia had been on the island. We eventually sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" marching through the native village. The natives were then moved to a nearby island due

to their heavy infection with elephantiasis. Emireau was loaded with boa constrictors, lizards, malaria mosquitoes and a jungle floor covered with multi-legged creatures full of a brown acid. Walking through them was like walking through a bowl of wet Rice Crispies. The juice saturated your shoes and other clothing. This caused a rash we called "the Chinese crud".

We were located in the triangle between Truk, Rabual and Kavien. Tokyo Rose was our major source of information. Fortunately, however, the Japanese were neutralized in a relatively short time. We then had the tropical paradise to ourselves. Five of us staff sergeants managed to insert a black Sea Bee driver with a beat up truck into a convoy of Army Stevedores, who were also black with beat up trucks. Our truck joined a convoy hauling supplies from a cargo ship to a new army coast artillery base being constructed on the other end of the island. We did obtain a cargo net of beer. This was considered a major accomplishment and supplement to the two cans of beer which we were allotted periodically. Unfortunately, again, we were moved and left the store behind beneath the sand floor of our tent. I believe the island now hosts a five star resort. I wonder who found our private cache.

We had many rumors concerning where and when we might go. One day, I was told to turn in my sea bag and prepare to leave at 2300 that evening. About two-dozen of us boarded three overloaded Navy R4D transport planes. We left sometime in the early dawn. I sloughed behind the copilot while the others squatted or lay on the cargo. OSHA was not a part of the Marine Corps.

We flew first to Biak, which was under fire. We refueled on the emergency strip at Owi which was short for the overloaded planes. We then landed at Peleliubefore continuing on to our destination. About 60 miles offshore, the pilot stated that he didn't have to worry about navigation. The rising black smoke on the horizon was our destination.

We landed on the single steel runway on the Leyte beach. The location was not far from the spot where MacArthur had his photo opt walking through the surf proclaiming "I have returned". Incidentally, some construction crew put up a small sign nearby that said: "With the help of God and a few Marines – MacArthur will take the Philippines". Needless to say, the sign was up only a day or so.

Our mission was to establish a spot on the very crowded single airstrip to accommodate our fighter attack squadron that was scheduled to arrive. We were also to help service the fleet as it lay offshore to engage in the battle of Leyte Gulf. It was a very restricted area and of great importance to both the United States and the Japanese. It was extremely busy day and night. Along with the other action, many nights we were under a parachute alert. Passwords were generally "gorillas in the air" or some other words with double L’s which the Japanese were alleged to have difficulty pronouncing. The site remained very active through Christmas Eve after which the Japanese air and sea power was greatly diminished. What was left of it went northward to defend other islands and the Japanese homeland.

In addition to exhaustion from work and lack of sleep, I have several other memories. When fighter planes, bombers, and antiaircraft dispute space overhead the laws of gravity take over. Spent ordnance returns to earth. It is also surprising how tracers light up the sky. Large naval shells going overhead have a slightly comforting feeling.

Thanksgiving, 1945, on Leyte was a truly memorable day. America went all out to furnish their troops, even in the field, a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner. Norman Rockwell would be proud. Unfortunately, there was persistent torrential rain that day in the Philippines. Our field kitchen was sheltered under a 15 x 30 or so tarpaulin. They filled our field mess kits with traditional ingredients. No matter how carefully we leaned over to guard the food, a few feet from the shelter the mashed potatoes turned into a very weak watery soup. The green peas popped up and down in the water and one by one went over the side. I salvaged a 2 1/2 inch piece of rain soaked turkey breast. My reaction reflected things I had learned three years before on Parris Island. One of the favorite exercises by the drill instructor, Sgt. Speranza, at the end of a very hard and tiring day often would be to stop to berate us and remind us how very badly the day had gone. He then stated that if we could do one thing right, he would dismiss us for the day. He would then shout an order which sounded like "port arms", "forward march" and some other gobbledygook. Individuals in the platoon each responded to what he had heard. The drill instructor would then straighten out the mess and berate us for our total incompetence. He would announce that we would have another hour (which usually lasted 10 to 15 minutes). It was a very effective training, however, for it dulled disappointment and frustration which is an important asset in all of life even when your Thanksgiving dinner washes out of your mess kit.

One morning after an especially busy night, I had an epiphany of sorts. While a bulldozer was pushing shattered equipment into the water and burying Japanese casualties in the sand, I concluded war is not a well-rendered Souza march. War is not a Michigan-Ohio State football game where there is a winner and a loser. Rather, war is a savage destruction of resources – human, financial, material and values. I have thought many times since what these resources might have contributed to our infrastructure, health, education and general welfare in creating a better world.

Unfortunately, it takes only one to start a war and everyone to start a peace.

I have great admiration and appreciation for those who have and are serving in the defense of our values. Unfortunately, once war is enjoined, there are few, if any alternatives for reaction.

I'm certain that tides and typhoons have long since moved the wreckage of war and the bodies into the deeper waters of Leyte Gulf to join thousands of other casualties and tons of ships, aircraft and ordnance.

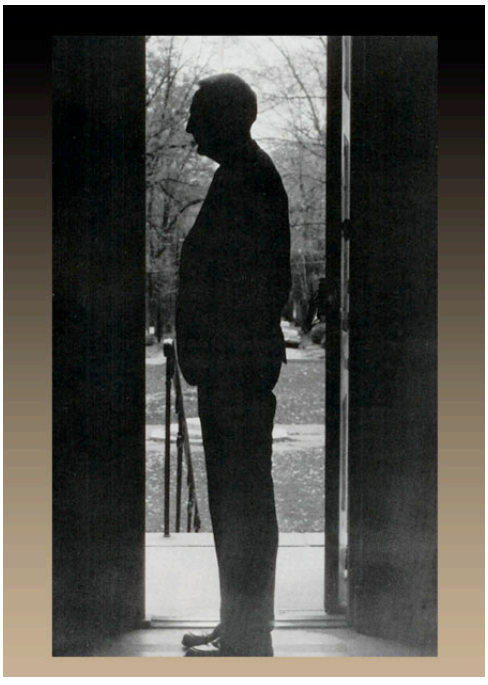
I left the Philippines in May 1945, for the United States. We were to prepare to return to the Pacific in September or October. Events of that August changed the situation immensely. The Marine Corps adopted a point system. I was credited with 16 months in

the South Pacific and three campaigns. I was honorably discharged October 24, 1945. I entered Syracuse University on the G.I. Bill on January 10, 1946. I married Marge, whom I had met at Santa Barbara, on September 1, 1946.



I appreciate the opportunity of serving with the Marine Corps. I feel it had a positive effect during the years following. In the early reunions, General Joe Foss, complete with cowboy hat and Congressional Medal of Honor, would gather us about him and say, “These are my boys.” It was very warming for us. It was overwhelming for our wives as they looked at their slightly overweight, balding and aging spouses.

VMFA 115 has remained active through the decades since WW II. For years many of us corresponded and visited each other. At the last reunion of the squadron, November 2013, held in North Carolina, I am aware of only three WW II enlisted men of the original group that were still alive. One, Rawlinson, attended the reunion. At the Marine birthday party, Nov. 10th, by tradition the oldest marine present was presented the first piece of birthday cake. Rawlinson, who joined us at Santa Barbara in 1943, by tradition, would receive the first piece of birthday cake. He would pass it on to the youngest Marine present.



The roll call changes. The {Ancestor Makers} of World War II, now the {Silver Eagles}, continue on.

Semper Fidelis

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[Dr. Brown, thank you for sharing, thank you for serving and thank you for surviving, from all who benefitted from your leadership of the College at Brockport.]