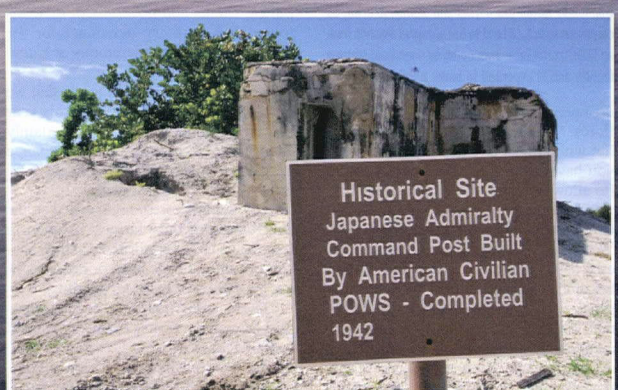
Former POWs John Dale and Frank Carbullido

Return to Wake Island



USMC PHOTO/1ST TSGT TOM CZERWINSKI, PA(AW)

Flying into Wake Island, memories flooded back, and then there were the remains of forced labor construction (left).

By Dan King

On Dec. 11, 2009, World War II Marine Corporal John Dale once again stood on Wake Island Atoll staring out into the horizon, scanning it for a distant memory rather than warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy. This time Dale was an honored guest on a trip organized by Military Historical Tours Inc., based in Virginia.

Today, few physical reminders of the battle for Wake Island remain, but with the help of tour director Major General Orlo K. Steele, USMC (Ret) and a few Air Force contractors on Wake, the area of Cpl Dale's artillery gun emplacement finally was located on Wilkes Island. The island is now a bird sanctuary, off-limits except in special cases.

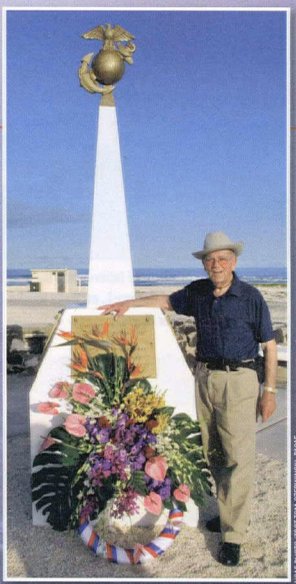
Dale, with his two oldest children, returned to the spot where he played a role in one of the most famous battles in Marine Corps lore. With typical humility he said his role was insignificant and that he was doing his job just like the other Americans. He wanted to share that part of his life with his children.

"Dad never talked about the war and being a POW. What little we did hear from him was usually at a church or school gathering when he was occasionally asked to speak. But otherwise it was plain he didn't want to talk about it," said son Fred, who traveled with his sister Vicki Bonner. "It was amazing to come here to Wake Island with my dad, to stand where he stood. I'm grateful to MHT for making this happen for us. We're all very proud of him."

The battle for Wake Island began for Dale on Dec. 11, 1941. When he saw the Japanese armada, he never could have imagined surviving the battle, let alone being back at the spot of his 5-inch coastal defense gun. He remembered when this tranquil atoll was the scene of a brief and brutal slugfest. He could still imagine a wasteland blasted by weeks of aerial bombardment.

Asked why he joined the pre-war Ma-

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USAF PHOTO/TSGT TOM CZERWINSKI, PACAF

Inset: Former Cpl John Dale, captured on Wake Island, Dec. 23, 1941, stands beside a memorial to those lost in the battle.

rine Corps, he quickly replied, "It was the summer of 1939, and I was working in Denver with the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. I saw the local Marine Corps recruiter, who was tall and impressive in his pretty blue uniform. Instantly I knew I wanted a uniform just like that. And, perhaps in a few months I would grow to be six foot tall like he was."

Enlisting on Sept. 13, 1939, he went to boot camp in San Diego. "And later when the Marine Corps learned I could handle a typewriter, a rare skill back then, I found myself stuck behind a desk, working as a company clerk.

"In January 1941, we were sent from Hawaii to Palmyra Island, a sister defensive position to Johnston Island and Wake Islands, but after serving as a clerk for nine months, I was bored of office work and ready for some action. So when we shipped out to Wake Island in November 1941, I requested an assignment to one of the coastal guns."

The 21-year-old typist from Kansas, who filled out paperwork all day, found himself training with a gun crew, standing right in the path of the massive Japanese naval force headed for Pearl Harbor.

Wake Island—actually a coral atoll with roughly 12 miles of coastline and consisting of the islands Wilkes, Wake and Peale—resembles the open pincers of a lobster. Located 2,000 miles west of Hawaii, it was claimed for the United States in 1898. Little was done to the atoll until Pan American Airways built a stopover base for its Transpacific Orient clipper route.

Pre-war U.S. strategic planning included Wake Island, but the projected seaplane base at the island to support long-range reconnaissance was not begun until early 1941. The first military force to arrive on Wake was the advance detail of the First Marine Defense Battalion on Aug. 19, 1941. Dale arrived Nov. 25, 1941.

When he arrived on Wake Island, there were 68 naval personnel and roughly 1,200 civilian contractors working for the Morrison-Knudsen Company. Many employees of the Pan Am Clipper line still lived on the island. Chamorros and Filipinos also were swept up in the battle for Wake Island.

Frank Carbullido, now 87, is a Chamorro from Guam, and in 1941 he was a storekeeper for the Pan Am Company. He witnessed, but did not engage in the Battle of Wake Island. With his family, Carbullido

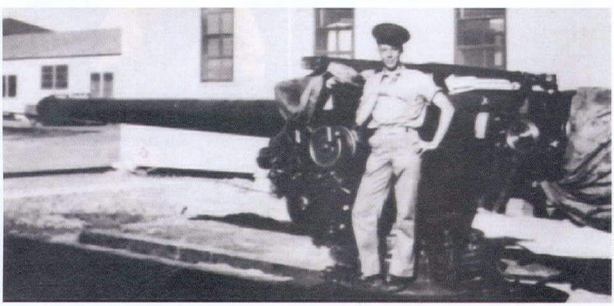
GARY ANDREAK, MAIT

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COURTESY OF GARY ANDREJAK, MHT

Japanese destroyer *Kisaragi* (above) was sunk by a well-executed Marine air attack, and Marine gunners, including John Dale of Battery L, on Wake used a 5-inch coastal defense gun like this one (below) to sink the Japanese destroyer *Hayate*.



COURTESY OF GARY ANDREJAK, MHT

returned with the MHT tour group to recall that fateful day when he became a prisoner of the Japanese.

With the start of the Pacific war, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters staff in Tokyo received glowing reports of the successful campaigns that started with simultaneous assaults on multiple Allied bases across the Pacific. In Germany, it was called *blitzkrieg*.

The Japanese plan was simple: hit first, hit hard and hit fast.

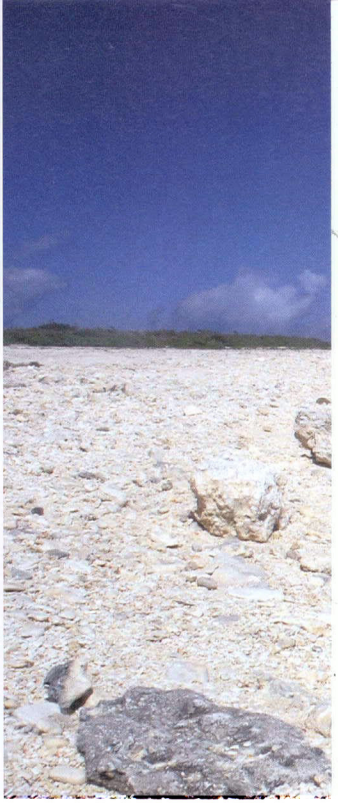
Everything for the Japanese was going better than expected except for one small island that refused to fall. The Japanese navy had assigned a task force to capture Wake Island, attacking on Dec. 8, 1941—Dec. 7 Hawaiian time. Bad weather forced the Japanese to abandon the plan when several men attempting to board landing boats were lost overboard. It was determined to be too risky to launch the landing boats and lose the Naval Landing Force troops. The invasion force attempted a second invasion Dec. 11.

The Japanese were mauled when they got into range of the four guns from Battery L. Dale recalled watching the Japanese warships zigzag, drawing closer in the predawn darkness, trying to draw the Marines' fire. The well-disciplined "gyrenes" held fast, waiting for permission to fire.

Dale sat in the gun's left seat, peering intently through the elevation scope, tracking an enemy destroyer. His gun's modern fire-control equipment had been knocked out in a previous bombing raid, so the WW I-era gun had to be sighted by Dale. He coordinated with the man in the right seat, who normally handled the azimuth, to aim the gun manually. Also, because of the damage by the Japanese, the gun could be discharged only by using the old lanyard system. Even in 1941, the Marines were taught to "improvise, adapt and overcome."

When permission was given to fire, the guns tore into the destroyer *Hayate*, putting several rounds into her magazine from more than 4,000 yards away. *Hayate* split in two and sank. Lieutenant Commander Minoru Takatsuka and his 168-man crew were lost. The Marines cheered, whooped and hollered as the enemy vessel went under. "Man, we thought we'd won the war all by ourselves!" recalled Dale, with obvious pride.

Stunned by the sudden and fierce attack from the island, the ships began to retreat to a safe distance, only to be jumped by Wake's F4F Wildcat fighters from Marine Fighting Squadron 211, commanded by Major Paul Putnam. One of the four Marines flying that mission was Captain



"Hammering" Hank Elrod.

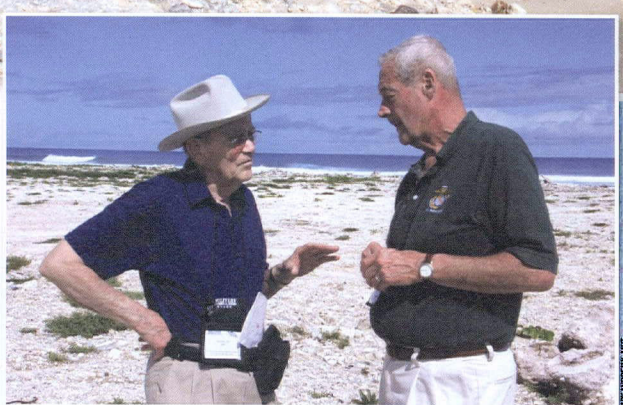
The Marine aviators strafed several warships and a freighter, and amazingly Capt Elrod dropped a 100-pound bomb onto the stern of the destroyer *Kisaragi*. That set off her depth charges, taking her crew and captain, Lieutenant Commander Yoichiro Ogawa, to the bottom. Capt Elrod posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his actions as a fighter pilot and an infantryman during the fighting on Wake.

The Marines thoroughly repulsed the invasion attempt of Thursday, Dec. 11, but knew the Japanese would be back. The Japanese 4th Fleet returned to Truk Lagoon to plan its revenge. Two warships were lost; at least three other vessels sustained damage; and not one Japanese soldier had set foot on the beach.

At Pearl Harbor and Singapore and in the Philippines, the Japanese Imperial Forces achieved amazing victories against greater odds, yet at Wake Island, they were humiliated by a puny force of Marines. This was unforgivable.

Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, commanding the Japanese 4th Fleet or South

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GARY ANDRESAK, MHT

Standing on the rough Wake beach, John Dale (left) describes the Marine defense to Military Historical Tours Inc. tour leader MajGen Orlo K. Steele, USMC (Ret).

Seas Force, had egg on his face and was bent on taking the atoll at any cost. Previously, he had been overly confident that the island's defense had been destroyed by air bombardment. He believed all the Wildcat fighters had been destroyed. His men paid dearly for that mistake on Dec. 11.

For the next two weeks, while the Japanese fleet retired to Truk and Kwajalein, Wake Island was plastered daily by Japanese bombers. U.S. fighter aircraft could not touch the bombers, and eventually they were destroyed on the ground or shot down.

The original Japanese force was bolstered with the aircraft carriers *Soryu* and *Hiryu* returning from the Pearl Harbor raid, additional cruisers and 1,500 more Japanese Naval Landing Force troops. To ensure that the troops would take the island, two WW I-era converted destroyers (Patrol Boats 32 and 33) were ordered to be beached on Wake Island to land the Japanese Marines and the ships' crews for hand-to-hand combat. There would be no turning back.

The Japanese were successful in their second landing attempt in the pre-dawn hours Dec. 23, 1941. The 450 U.S. Marines fought like madmen with every weapon in their arsenal and inflicted many casualties on the Japanese naval troops who scrambled down the sides of the old destroyers and over the boulders, coral and rocks to reach the Marines' fighting positions.

"We all knew the Japanese didn't take prisoners, and the Marines never surrendered, so this was it," recalled John Dale.

Both sides fought for their lives. For the Japanese there was no turning back. For the Marines there was nowhere to go. They were locked tight, like two wrestlers in a cage fight.

One Japanese Naval Landing Force marine, Lieutenant Shigeyoshi Ozeki, later

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said, "The air was filled with enemy tracer rounds that spun out like a glowing spider web just inches above our heads. We were pinned down by the terrifying amount of fire their heavy machine guns laid against us."

No hope of a rescue force reaching them, the tsunami tide of Japanese troops swarming ashore, confusion stemming from severed communications between the three islands and Japanese airpower joining in the attack convinced the Wake Island commander, Commander Winfield Scott Cunningham, USN, to surrender the island to prevent a bloodbath. CDR Cunningham did not know that on Wilkes Island the Marines had killed the Japanese troops who had managed to get ashore and had taken two wounded men as prisoners.

When the Marines on Wilkes Island moved toward Wake Island to regain communication with their commander, they saw Marine Maj James Devereux advancing toward them holding a white flag. The initial reaction by many was that the Japanese were surrendering or at least wanting to negotiate. When Devereux was within shouting distance, they could see he was under guard by armed Japanese. The major was issuing an order they thought they would never hear: "Lay down your arms."

After the war when asked how he felt about this, Dale replied, "I was shocked. We were surrendering? Marines don't surrender! But we obeyed the order without question. We pulled the bolts from our rifles and threw them into the scrub brush, then dropped our rifles and came out of our trench."

Did CDR Cunningham prematurely surrender the island? Perhaps, but with total control of the air and seapower, there was little hope of anything but prolonging the struggle. The eventual outcome was predetermined due to sheer numbers of Japanese men and machines.

The Japanese rounded up all the Marines and civilians. They stripped them nude and tied their hands behind their backs with communication wire, placing a loop around their necks to inhibit movement. They were lined up on the airstrip for three days without food or water, baking in the tropical heat with no shade.

"We expected to be gunned by the Japanese at any moment. We knew they didn't take prisoners," Dale said. But the Japanese eventually made it known the men would be treated humanely as POWs and be taken away.

For both Dale and Carbullido, the next 44 months were filled with deprivation, hunger and uncertainty. They were put aboard Japanese transports and taken to China. Both men initially were moved to Woo Sung and then Khangwan, China, near Shanghai. After three years, Dale was moved through Peking (Beijing), Manchuria and Korea to slave in a coal mine in Akabira, Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island.

"After working those long shifts in a coal mine for the closing three months of the war, I knew I didn't want to come home and be a coal miner," Dale said with a dark sense of humor.

Author's note: After Japan surrendered to U.S. Forces in August 1945, Dale and Carbullido were picked up by the U.S. Army and shipped home to naval hospitals in the San Francisco area. Carbullido later returned to Guam, married and raised a family. Dale returned to Oklahoma, was discharged, started a family and worked for the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission. He is featured in the award-winning documentary "Wake Island, Alamo of the Pacific." He traveled to Wake Island in 2003 for a week with several other Wake Island Marines for the filming of their firsthand accounts.

Editor's note: Special thanks to retired USAF pilot LtCol Gary Andrejak, who leads MHT tours to various WW II sites in Europe and the Pacific.

Dan King is co-host of the documentary "Wake Island, Alamo of the Pacific." He has interviewed more than 60 WW II Japanese army and navy veterans of various campaigns for his upcoming oral-history book on their firsthand experiences.

To find out more about Military Historical Tours, visit www.miltours.com.

The U.S. Air Force aircrew poses alongside distinguished guests, family members and friends on Wake Island during December 2009.



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