



TARAWA:

the second day

by Robert Sherrod



This is the story of what one reporter saw and heard and thought during one battle. No official documents have been consulted. I have relied entirely upon my memory of what happened only a few days ago on Tarawa, and upon my notebooks, which I started filling assiduously as soon after the landing as I could dry them out.

Later it seemed ridiculous that I should have been scribbling in notebooks during that first day and a half on Tarawa when it seemed certain that I would never have the chance to write any stories from them. I suppose that it was because I felt quite helpless to do anything else. I had a feeling that I should have been doing something to help win the battle, if possible. Yet there was nothing prescribed in a war correspondent's list of duties. So I sat there on our twenty-foot beachhead, back against the slender seawall that was our protection, fulfilling the nearest thing I had to a duty, while men were being killed all around me.

Any book about a battle is inadequate because it cannot impart to the reader a complete impression of what goes on in a battle. The same is true of photographs and films. There is not yet, for instance, any foolproof device for recording the sounds of battle, which are a thousand times more weird than anything the movies have conceived. The whole island of Tarawa would tremble whenever our warships loosed a salvo of shells or a formation of our planes dropped their bombs upon it. If the bombs were close enough, the island seemed to jump from under us, and sand ran into our shoes. These things have to be felt to be fully realized. And, certainly, no one who has not been there can imagine the overwhelming, inhuman smell of five thousand dead who are piled and scattered in an area of less than one square mile.

This is an attempt to tell not only what happened on Tarawa, but also what men felt under the stress of the most violent battle that Americans had endured in this, the greatest war Americans have known.

**—Robert Sherrod
January 1944**

THIS IS HOW THINGS STOOD at dawn of the second day: the three assault battalions held their precarious footholds—Major [Henry P. ("Jim")] Crowe's was about midway of the island's north beach, just east of the pier; Lieutenant Colonel [W. I.] Jordan's held a portion of the beach a couple of hundred yards west of Crowe, on the other side of the pier, and the third assault battalion, I learned, had landed on the strongly fortified western tip of the island, on the beak of the Betio bird. This last-named battalion, although separated from its staff and part of its troops, actually had been more successful than the first two. Under the leadership of Major Mike Ryan [now CG, III MAF] it had fought its way inland until it held a seventy-yard beachhead before dark of the first day. The naval gunfire had been particularly effective on this western end of the island, knocking out all the big guns

which had been the chief defense, and Major Ryan's men had, in the words of Colonel [David M.] Shoup, proved themselves "a bunch of fighting fools." The battalion, of course, was isolated from the rest of the Marines on the island.

During the first night the Japs, apparently because their communications had been disrupted and many of their men undoubtedly had been stunned, had not counterattacked. Probably as many as three hundred Japs, we learned later, had committed suicide under the fierce pounding of our naval guns and bombs.

Meanwhile, the Marines had landed Colonel Shoup's combat team reserve battalion, the first battalion of the Second Regiment. During the night considerable quantities of ammunition, some artillery, some tanks (light and medium), and other supplies had also been brought in.

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General Julian Smith had sent a message from his battleship headquarters: "Attack at dawn; division reserve will start landing at 0600." The division reserve was the first battalion of the Eighth Marines.

Our casualties had been heavy on the first day, but well over half the dead, and practically all of the wounded, had been shot, not in the water, but after they had reached land and climbed the seawall. Those wounded more than lightly in the water had little chance of reaching shore. The amphibious operation up to that point, therefore, could have been called better than successful. The hell lay in the unexpectedly strong fortifications we had found after we landed.

It was not possible—and never will be possible—to know just how many casualties the three assault battalions had suffered D Day. Most officers agreed afterward that thirty-five to forty percent was as good a guess as any. Effectively, they were groggy if they had not been knocked out, because their organization was ripped to pieces. Their percentage of casualties among officers had been heavier than among the men, and key men such as platoon sergeants, virtually irreplaceable, had been killed or wounded. Therefore, we had to have more men quickly, and General Smith had said they were on the way.

Because the second day was even more critical than the first, and because it was the day the tide finally turned in our favor, I have written a play-by-play chronology (as I saw it) from my notes:

0530: The coral flats in front of us present a sad sight at low tide. A half dozen Marines lie exposed, now that the water has receded. They are hunched over, rifles in hand, just as they fell. They are already one-quarter covered by sand that the high tide left. Further out on the flats and to the left I can see at least fifty other bodies. I had thought yesterday, however, that low tide would reveal many more than that. The smell of death, that sweetly sick odor of decaying human flesh, is already oppressive.

Now that it is light, the wounded go walking

by, on the beach. Some are supported by corpsmen; others, like this one coming now, walk alone, limping badly, their faces contorted with pain. Some have bloodless faces, some bloody faces, others only pieces of faces. Two corpsmen pass, carrying a Marine on a stretcher who is lying face down. He has a great hole in his side, another smaller hole in his shoulder. This scene, set against the background of the dead on the coral flats, is horrible. It is war. I wish it could be seen by the silken-voiced, radio-announcing pollyannas back home who, by their very inflections, nightly lull the people into a false sense of all-is-well.

0600: One of the fresh battalions is coming in. Its Higgins boats are being hit before they pass the old hulk of a freighter seven hundred yards from shore. One boat blows up, then another. The survivors start swimming for shore, but machine gun bullets dot the water all around them. Back of us the Marines have started an offensive to clean out the Jap machine guns which are now firing at our men in the water. They evidently do not have much success, because there is no diminution of the fire that rips into the two dozen or more Higgins boats. The *ratatatatat* of the machine guns increases, and the high *pi-i-ing* of the Jap sniper bullet sings overhead incessantly. The Japs still have some mortars, too, and



Marines wade ashore over coral reef.

at least one 40 or 77mm gun. Our destroyers begin booming their five-inch shells on the Jap positions near the end of the airfield back of us.

Some of the fresh troops get within two hundred yards of shore, while others from later waves are unloading further out. One man falls, writhing in the water. He is the first man I have seen actually hit, though many thousands of bullets cut into the water. Now some reach the shore, maybe only a dozen at first. They are calm, even disdainful of death. Having come this far, slowly, through the water, they show no disposition to hurry. They collect in pairs and walk up the beach, with snipers still shooting at them.

Now one of our mortars discovers one of the machine guns that has been shooting at the Marines. It is not back of us, but is a couple of hundred yards west, out in one of the wooden privies the dysentery-fearing Japs built out over the water. The mortar gets the range, smashes the privy, and there is no more firing from there.

But the machine guns continue to tear into the oncoming Marines. Within five minutes I see six men killed. But the others keep coming. One rifleman walks slowly ashore, his left arm a bloody mess from the shoulder down. The casualties become heavier. Within a few minutes more I can count at least a hundred Marines lying on the flats.

0730: The Marines continue unloading from the Higgins boats, but fewer of them are making the shore now. Many lie down behind the pyramidal concrete barriers the Japs had erected to stop tanks. Others make it as far as the disabled tanks and amtracs, then lie behind them to size up the chances of making the last hundred yards to shore. There are at least two



LtCol Rixley today
Battalion commanders at Tarawa.



Maj Crowe today
Battalion commanders at Tarawa.

hundred bodies which do not move at all on the dry flats, or in the shallow water partially covering them. This is worse, far worse than it was yesterday.

Now four of our carrier-based fighters appear over the water. The first makes a glide and strafes the rusty freighter hulk, then the second, third, and fourth. Thousands of their 50cal bullets tear into the old ship, each plane leaving a dotted, blue-gray line behind each wing. "The god-damn Japs must have swum out there last night and mounted a machine gun in that freighter," says an officer beside me. "I thought I saw some bullets coming this way."

Three more Hellcats appear. These carry small bombs under their bellies. The first dives for the freighter and misses by at least fifty yards. The second does likewise. But the third gets a direct hit and the old freighter gushes a flame fifty feet into the air. But the flame apparently is from the bomb explosion alone, because it dies out immediately. "May kill some of our own men out there with that bombing and strafing," observes LtCol Jordan, "but we've got to do it. That Jap machine gun is killing our men in the water." A dozen more bomber-fighters appear in the sky. One after another they glide gracefully to within a few hundred feet of the freighter, drop their bombs, and sail away. But only one of the twelve gets a hit on the freighter. I am surprised at their inaccuracy—one bomb is two hundred yards beyond the target. These fighter-bombers are less accurate than the more experienced dive bombers.

0800: Back at Colonel Jordan's command post nobody is happy. Things are still going badly. Colonel Jordan is talking to Major Crowe: "Are there many snipers behind your front lines? Uh, huh, we have a hell of a lot, too."



Red Beach Two on the second day.

"Where is my little runner? Where is Paredes?" asks Colonel Jordan.

"He is dead, Colonel. He was killed right over there," a Marine answers. Corporal Osbaldo R. Paredes of Los Angeles was a brave Marine. All during the first day he had carried messages through intense fire, never hesitating to accept the most dangerous mission. "Oh, hell!" says the misty-eyed colonel. "What a fine boy! I'll certainly see that his family gets the Navy Cross." He stops suddenly. The Navy Cross seems quite inadequate now, only a few minutes after Paredes has been killed.

By now all the coconut trees from which snipers had been shot yesterday are filled again with more snipers. The sniper fire seems more frequent than ever and nobody can stick his head out of the battalion shellhole without getting shot at. The hell of it is that they are in trees only a few yards away, and they are hard to spot. They are not dangerous at any respectable range, but from their nearby positions they can kill a lot of Marines. A Marine comes by headquarters grinning. "I just got one," he says. "He dropped his rifle on the third shot, and it fell at my feet. But I swear I haven't seen him yet. I guess they tie themselves to trees just like they did at Guadalcanal."

0830: By now most of the Marines have arrived who will ever get ashore from those waves that were hit so badly early this morning. Those lying behind the tank blocks and the disabled boats get up once in a while and dash for shore. But I'm afraid we lost two hundred of them this morning, maybe more.

A captain comes by and reports that one of his men has single-handedly knocked out eight machine gun nests—five yesterday and three this

morning. Another unattached officer, whose normal duty is a desk job, not combat, drops in and reports that he finally killed a sniper. He had been out looking all morning—"How can you kill the bastards if you can't see them?"—and he finally had fired a burst into a coconut palm. Out dropped a Jap, wearing a coconut-husk cap. We feel that we are eliminating a lot of Jap machine gunners and snipers now. As the last men come ashore, there is only one machine gun firing at them, and it hits nobody.

0940: Now the high explosives are really being poured on the Jap positions toward the tail end of the island. Our 75mm pack howitzers are firing several rounds a minute. The strafing planes are coming over by the dozens, and the dive bombers by the half-dozens. Now we have many 81mm mortars joining the deathly orchestra. Betio trembles like a leaf, but I ask myself, "Are we knocking out many of those pillboxes?"

We know the Japs are still killing and wounding a lot of men. The stretchers are passing along the beach again, carrying their jungle-cloth-covered burdens. One Marine on a stretcher is bandaged around the head, both arms, and both legs. One of the walking wounded, his left arm in a white sling, walks slowly along the beach in utter contempt of the sniper who fires at him.

1100: Finally at Colonel Shoup's headquarters. And what a headquarters! Fifteen yards inland from the beach, it is a hole dug in the sand back of a huge pillbox that probably was some kind of Japanese headquarters. The pillbox is forty feet long, eight feet wide, and ten feet high. It is constructed of heavy coconut logs, six and eight inches in diameter. The walls of the pillbox are two tiers of coconut logs, about three feet apart. The logs are joined together by eight-inch steel spikes, shaped like a block letter C. In between the two tiers of logs are three feet of sand, and covering the whole pillbox several more feet of sand are heaped. No wonder our bombs and shells hadn't destroyed these pillboxes! Two-thousand-pound bombs hitting directly on them might have partially destroyed them, but bombing is not that accurate—not even dive bombing—on as many pillboxes as the Japs have on Betio. And when bombs hit beside such structures they only throw up more sand on top of them.

Colonel Shoup is nervous. The telephone shakes in his hand. "We are in a mighty tight spot," he is saying. Then he lays down the



Col Shoup (with map) at his CP.

phone and turns to me, "Division has just asked me whether we've got enough troops to do the job. I told them no. They are sending the Sixth Marines, who will start landing right away." Says a nearby officer: "That damned Sixth is cocky enough already. Now they'll come in and claim they won the battle."

From his battalion commanders Colonel Shoup receives regular telephone reports. One of them is now asking for air bombardment on a Jap strongpoint on the other side of the airfield, which we can see a few hundred feet from regimental headquarters. "All right," says the colonel, putting down the telephone. "Air liaison officer!" he calls, "tell them to drop some bombs on the southwest edge of 229 and the southwest edge of 21. There's some Japs in there giving us hell." The numbers refer to the keyed blocks on the map of the island. It seems less than ten minutes before four dive bombers appear overhead, then scream toward the earth with their bombs, which explode gruffly: *Ka-whump, ka-whump, ka-whump, ka-whump*. Even nearer than the bombs, destroyer shells in salvos of four are bursting within ten minutes after a naval liaison officer has sent directions by radio.

Next to regimental quarters rises a big, uncompleted barracks building, which withstood our bombing and shelling very well. There are only a few small holes in the roof and wooden sides of the building. Five-foot tiers of coconut logs surround the building, to protect it against shrapnel. I run the thirty feet from Colonel Shoup's command post eastward to the tier and leap over it. Some Marines are in the unfloored building, lying on the ground, returning a Jap sniper's fire which comes from we know not where. Says a Marine: "That god-damn smokeless powder they've got beats anything we ever had." Then I cross the interior of the building, go through a hole in the wall and sit down beside some Marines who are in the alleyway between the wooden building and the tier of coconut logs.

"This gets monotonous," says a Marine as a bullet whistles through the alley. We are comparatively safe, sitting here, because we are leaning against the inside of the log tier, and the vertical logs that act as braces are big enough for us to squeeze behind. The problem is to flatten one's legs against the ground so that they are not exposed to the sniper's fire.

1130: These Marines are from Company H, the heavy-weapons company of the battalion I came with. "We've already had fifteen men

killed, more in twenty-four hours than we had on Guadalcanal in six months," said the Marine sitting next to me, "and I don't know how many wounded."

"We started in in one amtrac, and it got so hot the driver drove off before he had unloaded all of us. Then the amtrac sank—it had been hit—and another one picked us up and brought us ashore."

Where had they landed? "Right over there by that pillbox with the four Japs in it," he replies, pointing to the spot near which Bill Hipple and I had dug our foxhole. "You know who killed those Japs? Lieutenant Doyle of Company G did it—that's P. J. Doyle from Neola, Iowa—he just tossed a grenade in, then he jumped in with the Japs and shot them all with his carbine before they could shoot him."

By now it is fairly raining sniper bullets through our alley, as if the sniper is desperate because he isn't hitting anybody. The sniper is evidently a couple of hundred yards away, because there is a clear space that is far back from the open end of the alley. Japs can hide behind a coconut log without being seen all day, but nobody ever heard of one hiding behind a grain of sand.

A bullet ricochets off the side of the barracks building and hits the leg of the private who is second down the line. "I'm glad that one was spent," he says, picking up the .303cal copper bullet, which is bent near the end of the nose. I reach out for the bullet and he hands it to me. I drop it quickly because it is almost as hot as a live coal. The Marines all laugh.

These Marines calmly accept being shot at. They've grown used to it by now, and I suddenly realize that it is to me no longer the



Storming bomb-proof enemy stronghold.



"Come out, or we come in!"

novelty it was. It seems quite comfortable here, just bulling. But I am careful to stay behind the upright coconut log which is my protection against the sniper.

Into the alleyway walks a Marine who doesn't bother to seek the protection of the coconut logs. He is the dirtiest man I have seen on the island—men get dirty very quickly in battle, but this one has a good quarter inch of gray-black dust on his beardless face and his dungarees are caked. A lock of blond hair sticks out from under his helmet.

"Somebody gimme some cigarettes," he says. "That machine gun crew is out there in a shell-hole across the airfield and there's not a cigarette in the crowd." One of the Marines throws him a pack of Camels.

The new arrival grins, "I just got me another sniper. That's six today, and me a cripple." I ask if he has been shot. "Hell, no," he says, "I busted my ankle stepping into a shellhole yesterday." His name? "PFC Adrian Strange." His home? "Knox City, Texas." Age? "Twenty."

PFC Adrian Strange stands for a few minutes, fully exposed to the sniper who has been pecking at us. Then the sniper opens up again, the bullets rattling against the coconut logs.

PFC Strange sings out, "Shoot me down, you son-of-a-bitch." Then he leisurely turns around and walks back across the airfield, carrying his carbine and the pack of cigarettes.

"That boy Strange," says the Marine next to me, "he just don't give a damn."

1200: Colonel Shoup has good news. Major Ryan's shorthanded battalion has crossed the western end of the island (the bird's head), and the entire eight-hundred-yard beach up there is now ours. There are plenty of Japs just inside the beach, and the fortifications on the third of the island between Shoup's command

post and Ryan's beach are very strong. And the entire south shore of the island, where there are even stronger pillboxes than there were on the north, remains to be cleaned out. That is the job of the Sixth Regiment, which will land this afternoon.

A young major comes up to the colonel in tears. "Colonel, my men can't advance. They are being held up by a machine gun." Shoup spits, "Goddlemighty, one machine gun."

1215: Here the Marines have been sitting in back of this pillbox (Shoup's headquarters) for twenty-four hours. And a Jap just reached out from an air vent near the top and shot Corporal Oliver in the leg. In other words, there have been Japs within three feet—the thickness of the wall—of the Marines' island commander all that time. Three Japs had been killed in the pillbox yesterday, and we thought that was all there were.

There is very bad news about Lieutenant [William D.] Hawkins. He may die from his three wounds. He didn't pay much attention to the shrapnel wound he got yesterday, but he has been shot twice this morning. He wouldn't be evacuated when he got a bullet through one shoulder. "I came here to kill Japs; I didn't come here to be evacuated," he said. But a while ago he got a bullet through the other shoulder, and lower down. He lost a lot of blood from both wounds.

Said the corporal who told me this, "I think the Scout and Sniper platoon has got more guts than anybody else on the island. We were out front and Morgan (Sergeant Francis P. Morgan of Salem, Oregon) was shot in the throat. He was bleeding like hell, and saying in a low voice, 'Help me, help me.' I had to turn my head."

Lieutenant Paine, who had been nicked in the rear as he stood talking to us—"I'll be damned. I stay out front four hours, then I come back to the command post and get shot"—has more news about Hawkins. "He is a madman," says Paine. "He cleaned out six machine gun nests, with two to six Japs in each nest. I'll never forget the picture of him standing on that amtrac, riding around with a million bullets a minute whistling by his ears, just shooting Japs. I never saw such a man in my life."

The young major whose men were held up by a single machine gun was back again. "Colonel, there are a thousand goddamn Marines out there on that beach, and not one will follow me across to the air strip," he cries, desperately. Colonel Jordan, who by this time was back at

his old job as observer, our battalion having been merged with Major Wood B. Kyle's reinforcing first battalion, speaks up, "I had the same trouble. Most of them are brave men, but some are yellow." I recall something a very wise general once told me, "In any battle you'll find the fighting men up front. Then you'll find others who will linger behind, or find some excuse to come back. It has always been that way, and it always will. The hell of it is that in any battle you lose a high percentage of your best men."

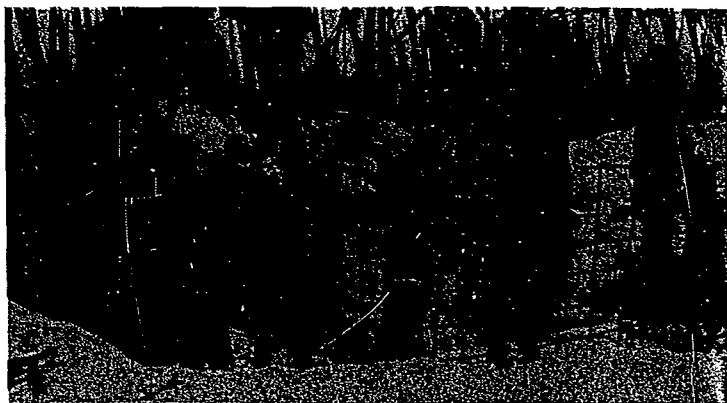
Says Colonel Shoup, "You've got to say, 'Who'll follow me? And if only ten follow you, that's the best you can do, but it's better than nothing.'"

1300: Now they are bringing up the dead for burial near the command post. There are seven laid out about ten yards from where I sit. They are covered with green and brown ponchos, only their feet sticking out. I think: what big feet most American soldiers and Marines have! None of those looks smaller than a size eleven. The stench of the dead, as the burial detail brings them past and lines them up on the ground, is very heavy now.

Somebody brings in the story of a Jap sniper whose palm tree roost was sprayed repeatedly. But he kept on firing, somehow. Finally, in disgust, a sergeant took a machine gun and fired it until he had cut the tree in two, near the top. The fall is supposed to have killed the Jap.

1430: Things look better now. The amtracs—those that are left—are bringing stuff ashore and carrying the wounded regularly, and they got shot at only occasionally when they head back into the water. Major Ryan and his crowd are doing very well at the western end of the island, and the Sixth Marines are about to land there and start down the south shore. We've got another company of light tanks ashore, and they are going up as close as possible to the Jap pillboxes and firing high explosives into the slits. The improved situation is reflected in everyone's face around headquarters.

1600: Bill Hipple [an Associated Press reporter] and I head east along the beach to Major Crowe's headquarters. By this time we are so confident that the battle is running in our favor that we do not even crouch down, as we walk four feet apart, one ahead of another. After we cross the base of the pier the inevitable sniper's bullet sings by. "Jesus," says Hipple, "do you know that damned bullet went between us?" We crouch down under the



Some came out and were captured.

protection of the seawall during the rest of the journey.

That tough, old-time Marine, Jim Crowe, is having a tough time yet, but he is still as cool as icebox lettuce. "We kill 'em and more come filtering up from the tail of the island," he says. I ask him about his casualties. "Already had about three hundred in my battalion," he says.

A young tank officer, Lieutenant Louis Largey, reports to the major as we are talking to him. "I just killed a Marine, Major Crowe," he says bitterly. "Fragments from my 75 splintered against a tree and ricocheted off. God damn, I hated for that to happen."

"Too bad," mutters Crowe, "but it sometimes happens. Fortunes of war."

The heavy tanks are being used against the pillboxes. They have tried crushing them, but even a thirty-two-ton tank is not very effective against these fortifications. "We got a prisoner last night," said Crowe, "and we have four more, temporarily, sealed up in a pillbox. I suppose they'll kill themselves before we get 'em out."

The strafing planes are coming overhead in waves now and the grease-popping sound of their guns is long and steady. "Don't know how much good they do," says Crowe, "but we know their bullets will kill men if they hit anything. One fifty-caliber slug hit one of my men—went through his shoulder, on down through his lung and liver. He lived about four minutes. Well, anyway, if a Jap ever sticks his head out of his pillbox the planes may kill him."

1630: Crowe is talking on the phone, apparently to Colonel Shoup: "I suggest we hold a line across from the Burns-Philp pier tonight." That means his men have advanced about two hundred yards to the east, toward the tail of the island, and he believes they can hold a line

all the way across the island, which is about six hundred yards wide at that point. Meantime, my old battalion, plus the reinforcements, are cleaning out the center of the island, Major Ryan's battalion is holding the western end, and a battalion of the Sixth Marines is landing to start down the southern shore (the Betio bird's back). We can see the light now. We are winning, but we've still got to dig out every last Jap from every last pillbox, and that will cost us a lot of Marines. I reflect: isn't that true of our whole war against the Japs? They haven't got a chance and they know it, unless we get fainthearted and agree to some kind of peace with them. But, in an effort to make us grow sick of our losses, they will hang on under their fortifications, like so many bedbugs. They don't care how many men *they* lose—human life being a minor consideration to them. The Japs' only chance is our getting soft, as they predicted their whole war on our being too luxury-loving to fight.

Of this much I am certain: the Marines are not too soft to fight. More than three thousand of them are by this time assaulting pillboxes full of the loathsome bugs, digging them out.

1700: Hipple and I are surprised to see two more correspondents—we had long since decided that none others were alive. But Dick Johnston, a young, pencil-thin U.P. man, and Frank ("Fearless") Filan, A.P. photographer, had also managed to land with the assault waves. "Filan, here," says Johnston, "is a hero. The Marine next to him was shot as they waded in. Filan started helping him back to the boat. But then a sniper opened up on the boat from the side. The Marine beat Filan to the shore. And Filan ruined all his cameras and equipment helping the Marine." The two correspondents report that at least one more correspondent arrived this morning. Don Senick, the newsreelman. "His boat was turned back yesterday," says Johnston, "but they got ashore this morning. Senick ought to get the Purple Heart. He was sitting under a coconut tree. A bullet hit above his head and dropped on his leg. It bruised him."

Lieutenant Largey sits down beside us. "Were you ever inside a tank when it got hit?" he asks. "The spot inside the tank where the shell hits turns a bright yellow, like a sunrise. My tank got two hits a while ago." Largey walks back to his iron horse. Says Johnston, "That guy is a genius at keeping his tanks running. He repairs the guns, refuels them somehow, and reloads them with ammunition."



"What happened to the ice cream?"

A tall, grinning Marine is here at headquarters getting ammunition. He has a bandage on his arm, and a casualty tag around his neck like those the corpsmen put on every man they treat—in case he collapses later from his wound.

"Get shot in the arm?" asks Jim Crowe.

"Yes, sir," says Morgan.

"What'd you do, stick your arm out of a foxhole, eh?"

"No, sir, I was walking alongside a tank." And Morgan goes on about his business, gathering ammunition. Crowe looks up at the sky, which is full of planes. "Look at them god-damn strafing planes. They haven't killed fifty Japs in two days," he growls.

A grimy Marine seated alongside us muses: "I wonder what our transport did with those sixteen hundred pints of ice cream that was to be sent ashore yesterday after the battle was over."

An officer comes in and reports to Major Crowe that a sniper is raising hell with the people working on supplies at the end of the pier. By this time we are stacking great piles of supplies on the end of the pier. The officer thinks the fire is coming, not from the beach, but from a light tank that is half sunk in the water. It is the same tank that I saw the naked figure dive into as I came ashore. These devilish Japs!

A destroyer standing so close to shore that it must be scraping bottom has been ordered to fire at a big concrete blockhouse a couple of hundred yards away from us. First, it fires single rounds—five or six of them. Then, when the range is found, it opens up with four guns at a time and to us it seems that all bedlam has

broken loose. After about eighty rounds it stops. "They never hit it squarely," says Major Crowe, "but almost."

1803: Now, at three minutes past six, the first two American Jeeps roll down the pier, towing 37mm guns. "If a sign of certain victory were needed," I note, "this is it. The Jeeps have arrived."

1900: Back at regimental headquarters, Colonel Shoup wipes his red forehead with his grimy sleeve and says, "Well, I think we are winning, but the bastards have got a lot of bullets left." I ask him how much longer it would last. "I believe we'll clean up the entire western end of the island tomorrow, maybe more. It will take a day or two more to root them all out of the tail end of the island."

A surgeon grunts and rises from where he has been working feverishly over a dozen wounded Marines who lie on the beach. His blood plasma containers hang from a line strung between a pole and a bayoneted rifle stuck upright into the ground. Four deathly pale Marines are receiving the plasma through tubes in their arms. "These four will be all right," the doctor thinks, "but there are a lot more up the beach that we probably can't save." He continues, "This battle has been hell on the medical profession. I've got only three doctors out of the whole regiment. The rest are casualties, or they have been lost or isolated. By now nearly all the corpsmen have been shot, it seems to me."

Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey, a blue-eyed, mustachioed Virginian who commands the artillery attached to Colonel Shoup's regimental combat team, is the first man I have heard pick the turning point of the battle, "I thought up until one o'clock today it was touch and go. Then I knew we would win. It's not over yet, but we've got 'em." Supplies are beginning to flow over the pier in quantity now. The last of Colonel Rixey's 37's and 75's are being landed, "at long last," he says.

"You know what," says Colonel Rixey, "I'll bet these are the heaviest casualties in Marine Corps history. I believe we've already lost more than ten per cent of the division and we haven't landed all of it." Until now I haven't considered Tarawa in the light of history. It has only seemed like a brawl—which it is—that we might easily have lost, but for the superb courage of the Marines. But, I conclude, Colonel Rixey may have something there. Maybe this is history.¹

1930: Hipple and I begin digging our fox-

hole for the night—this time a hundred yards further up the beach, next to Amtrac No. 10. "This one came in on the first wave," says a nearby Marine, "there were twenty men in it, and all but three of them were killed."

As we dig deeper, the smell from our foxhole becomes oppressive. "Not all the Japs used those privies over the water," I commented. Hipple has finished digging with the shovel, and now he begins smoothing the foxhole with his hands—all foxholes should be finished by hand. The smell is so oppressive we throw a few shovelfuls of sand back into the hole to cover at least some of the odor.

Then we lie down to sleep. It has been more than sixty hours since we closed our eyes and the danger of a night attack has been all but eliminated, so we sleep soundly.

2400: We are rudely awakened after three hours' sleep. The tide has come up and flooded our foxhole. This is unusual, because the tide has not been this high since we reached the island. We sit on a bank of sand, wide-awake and knowing that there will be no more sleep tonight. Besides, Washing Machine Charley will be due soon and nobody can sleep while being bombed.

0500: Washing Machine Charley was over at four o'clock. He dropped eight bombs in his two runs over the island. Said Keith Wheeler, later, "He was absolutely impartial; he dropped half his bombs on us and half on the Japs." Water or no water, we lay face down in our foxhole as he came over. As the bombs hit, there was a blinding flash a couple of hundred yards up the beach, to the west. A few minutes later a Marine came running up the beach, shouting, "There are a lot of men hurt bad up here. Where are the corpsmen and the stretchers?" He was directed to a pile of stretchers nearby. Soon the stretcher bearers returned, silhouetted by the bright half-moon as they walked along the beach. Washing Machine Charley had killed one man, had wounded seven or eight.

0530: At first light, Bill Hipple looks at what had been our foxhole. Then he learns that the odor was caused, not by Jap excrement, but by the body of a dead man who had been buried beside the foxhole. Bill had been clawing the face of a dead man as he put the finishing touches on the foxhole. USMC

¹At Soissons July 19, 1918, the Marines suffered 1,303 casualties. They probably took more the first day on Tarawa, and the ratio of dead to wounded was 1 to 2 instead of 1 to 10.