



THE 503rd HERITAGE BATTALION WEB SITE



http://corregidor.org/heritage_battalion/nycum/chx_alt

For its successful capture of Corregidor, the 503rd was awarded a **Presidential Unit Citation (US)** and received its nickname, **“THE ROCK REGIMENT”**

AIRBORNE.....ALL THE WAY!

Accounting of Contributions for 5 Guest Couples

Total committed: \$8826.25

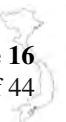
Total received: \$8151.25

Expenditures to date:

Lodging:	\$3677.80
Registration:	1500.00
Jackets & Hats:	1050.00
Reunion Pins:	98.00
Plaques:	400.00
Gift Baskets:	175.00
Week's Meal Money:	1275.00
Corregidor Maps:	240.00
Scholarship Donation:	100.00*
Subtotal:	7465.80
Cash On-Hand:	686.05

* Thanks to Ed Carns A/2/503d, who made a double donation. With his concurrence Chapter 30 sent \$100. in Ed's name to the 173d Scholarship Fund. Should any funds remain after all expenses are paid, Chapter 30 will make a donation to the 173d Scholarship Fund in the names of all donors.

**IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO REGISTER TO
ATTEND THE REUNION
IN NORTH MYRTLE BEACH.
SEE YOU THERE!!!**



~ REMEMBERING NUMB3RS ~



**Numbers are driving me nuts!
Yes. It says "Jesus Hates Legs"**

Lately, numbers have been driving me nuts; these days they all seem to be swirling around in my head, smashing into one another as if atoms on drugs. And, there's 62+ years of them accumulated up there, leaving little space for new numbers to take a foothold, which is probably all well and good.

Simply remembering the mish mash of digits stored in there is enough to drive a sink to drink. But, like all of the senses, the congering-up of numbers can easily throw us back to times and places, oft times places we might not enjoy being thrown back to....sometimes.

For instance, 20 often reminds me of the big, mean, nasty sergeant or the too young, pale-faced 2LT rightly proud of his new device, who too often would ask me in rather pointed terms to drop and give that number to them. I could never understand their fixation with that quantity when 3 is an equally good number.

Yet, we can't live without numbers nor can we get thru the day without relying on those atom wanabe's demanding our attention. Plus, without them how would I know morning coffee requires 4 large spoon fulls of sugar lest it taste like shoe wax? Even my elderly German father in-law was not exempt from the influence of numbers when, after seeing a bottle of 7-Up for the first time, wryly noted in English, "*I wish I could get one up!*" Ahh, those funny Germans, *Ja Ja*.

Numbers, I suppose, are necessary after all; they're the way we measure important stuff. Like the way the shoeless, smudged-faced, cute little imp in the ville, after giving him a few cans of C-Rats, rightly pointed out, "*You Numba One G.I.*" Numbers can be fickle, however, as it wasn't much later when after refusing the favors of a not-so-cute lass in that same ville, she declared I was instead a "*Numba 10 G.I.*," then went about speaking discouragingly about my familial lineage

in broken English. Oddly, no one ever mentions hearing of a "Number 5 G.I." I'm sure there were some.

365 and a wake-up...a very large number indeed. M-16, M-79, .50 cal, today just more useless numbers milling around up there, taking-up space and getting in the way of remembering what time she said dinner would be ready. C-130, C-47, B-747. I prefer the B-747, business class please.

So, why do we place so much import on numbers? And why are they so damn difficult to remember? RA19841371, funny, we never forget those numbers.

As a young lad in school I once learned what a peck and a bushel were and how many thingies one might expect to find in each; but alas, I've never owned either and would be hard-pressed to correctly cite such quantities today. I do know morning coffee tastes sooooo sweet with three spoon fulls of sugar...or is it four? Damn atoms!

503 is another number worth remembering.

**Smitty Out
HHC/2/503d, '65-'66**

BUTTERFLIES & PARATROOPERS An Airborne Reunion Like No Other

It's 4 a.m. here in Merritt Island, FL according to the wall clock she bought years ago; the one with the colorful butterflies imprinted next to the 2 and 8 hour markers on its face; and where the 6 should be, but isn't, the temperature reads almost 80 degrees with no humidity in sight. It's a gaudy looking silent clock. If allowed, one could become giddy thinking of the winters Sky Soldier buddies Wayne Hoitt in NH and Mike McMillan in WY are continuing to enjoy this early April morn. Another clock is on the patio here somewhere, its ticking and the rustle of the breeze through the palm leaves are the only sounds to be heard.



It's a good, quiet time to address the note received yesterday from one of the driving forces behind this year's 173d reunion, good buddy Wayne Bowers:

"Smitty: I plan on putting together a reunion Program to be given to all who attend. I would like to have a section explaining the connection between the old 503d and the 173d.... Just briefly explain the link and how or why you came up with this idea (of inviting 503rd WWII paratroopers to the reunion). Wayne."

(continued...)



Wayne requested two pages, but that's a lot of words, so I asked Paul Whitman, manager of the 503rd Heritage Battalion web site, to share his thoughts as well.

The writing assignment by Wayne, while understood, was not a welcome one. Instantly upon reading his request, I knew it would not be an easy task to fulfill, at least if it was to be fulfilled honestly. How did we come up with this idea, he asked. The answer, while simple, carried with it certain complications. The easy part was contacting the web manager, Paul, of the 503rd web site.

Paul is an Aussie living in Manila who, some years ago, fell in love with the WWII 503rd guys and has since done a superb job building and maintaining their historical web site. Writing him and requesting permission to run a story or two from that site in our 2/503d Vietnam Newsletter, he responded offering us unlimited use of stories, photos and other material from that site. Up to that moment I knew little of the 503rd, other than we shared the same unit designator and they had jumped in to Corregidor during WWII, ergo "The Rock."

With our reunion coming up in North Myrtle Beach, it just seemed logical and timely to broach the subject of inviting a few of those troopers to the event, and I asked Paul what he thought about the idea -- he agreed, it would be great if it could be done. Within days the reunion committee members voted unanimously in favor of it, and within one week guys of the 173d and friends of the 173d committed sufficient funds to help accomplish this, well over 150 people in all (ultimately over 180 in all).

Originally we planned to invite three WWII 503rd troopers and their spouses, but due to overwhelming support, we were able to invite 5 couples. Four troopers and their companions are confirmed as of this hour, and there's a shared excitement in the air by men of both the 173d and 503rd who are looking forward to this gathering.

But why? Why are we doing this now? This part of Wayne's question I rued answering as it would necessitate addressing these past 45 years or so, over four decades when men of the 503rd and 173d could have and should have yet didn't come together. Perhaps the timing wasn't right until now?

Many believe we, Vietnam vets, were shunned by our brothers from WWII, and there may be truth to that; hell, we were shunned by everyone else. Perhaps it was and remains the position of many 503rd guys theirs would be "a last man standing organization" -- that when they died the unit died, still subscribed to by some men, but not all.

Then, some time in the interim, something happened to us all....we matured, we all became old men. Not all,

really, for the history of the 503rd which began in the foxholes on islands in the Pacific in the early 40's and was passed on to us, is being carried forward by the young paratroopers in the Middle East, and new chapters of the 503rd history are still being written.

Planned, wanted or not, the legacy of the 503rd will outlive us all. Those daring young troopers now back in Afghanistan serving with the 503rd Infantry Regiment are that colorful butterfly at the 2 position on the clock hanging in this patio here in Florida. Our 503rd brothers from WWII are marking time alongside the butterfly at the 8 o'clock position, with us quickly marching in cadence step behind, holding the place of the temperature gauge on that time piece where the 6 should be but isn't, all of us looking at the 12 o'clock hour.

And silently, yet never abating nor pausing, that clock continues to tick into the future, ever forward. Maybe, just maybe, by bringing together the three generations of 503rd Paratroopers we can slow that ticking, if only for a moment.

Smitty Out

THE 503rd P.R.C.T. HERITAGE BATTALION

~ AN UNBROKEN LINE ~

Lineage is Loyalty

It's a bit difficult for me to explain "the connection between the old 503d and the 173d" in the sense that this isn't my specialty.

John Reynolds, of the WWII 503d, wrote the *Three Winds of Death* column in *The Static Line*, and he dealt with the technicalities of the Lineage connections. His combined article is at http://corregidor.org/heritage_battalion/lineage/lineage_503_commentary.htm and as it's on the website, you are free to use it.

It's one thing to write of the formation of the 503d of WWII, but quite another to deal with the decisions the Army made when, in August 1945, it had to face a period of military retrenchment in which valued units had to be broken up, reorganized, consolidated or disbanded.

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On 16 February 1945, the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment jumps in to Corregidor.

When they went into Negros, the 503d had been the sharpest axe in the SWPA shed, but they were only a Regimental Combat Team and their highest representative in the “corridors of power” was only a Colonel. Whilst the 503d had been fighting in Negros, the 11th Airborne had been in a reserve area in the Philippines and had been preparing to have a role in the next theater, Operation Olympic, in which large-scale airborne envelopment was planned beyond anything seen in the SWPA before.

To say that the Negros operation had not been kind to the 503d would be an understatement. Their misuse in Negros had been perhaps the stupidest use of a paratroop unit in WWII, and thus it was an easy decision within those “corridors of power” to disband them and to roll its members into a Division, and send them off to Japan for occupation duty. By Christmas Eve 1945, the 503d had been “inactivated.”

So essentially, to my eye, there’s no direct line drawn from the 503d of WWII to the 173d. However, I am not a US Army bureaucrat who can define the indefinable and thus reactivate the “inactivated” and create an unbroken line which can then link units from four wars into a Lineage. But I accept it, I praise it, even though in

my own view, it is drawn from the younger men up to elders, and not vice versa.

Where the US Army redeemed its sin of deactivating the WWII 503d, was by recognizing that, notwithstanding their post-war industrial and management techniques, there is a singular advantage to honoring the ancient system of Regimental Lineage, to engender an esprit de corps in its members which builds throughout the years, even peaceful ones. Perhaps they had seen the way that the British and Canadian regiments had operated, using their unit history, traditions, the continuance of battle honors, ceremonial uniforms, cap badges, peculiarities of insignia, marches and songs as means of administering a soldier’s military career, and creating the desire to volunteer to that specific Regiment that no mere jingo poster can.

So it is in that sense that I hold such faith in the concept of Heritage and Lineage, that I see that the history of the 503d of WWII should not be allowed to fade with the passing of its troopers, but should be inherited by the Lineage, in this case, the 173d Airborne Brigade. Lineage is Loyalty.

**Paul Whitman
503rd Heritage Battalion**





HOW I REMEMBER IT

MY PRIVATE WAR - CHET NYCUM

Negros

by Chet Nycum
"G" Company, 503rd PRCT

"...WE WERE TAUGHT JAPANESE, LEARNING TO SAY 'I AM AN AMERICAN,' 'I NEED WATER', 'I SURRENDER' AND 'HELLO' (KO-NI-CHI-WA). HELLO IN JAPANESE WAS THE ONLY WORD I MASTERED, AND I CONSIDERED IT TO BE USELESS, FOR IF I MET A JAP AND HAD TIME TO SAY ANYTHING, 'GOOD-BYE' WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE."



It took me a little time to get my gear together, about three days, but that was about all the time it's taken to find myself in the midst of another preparation for a combat operation. Having just enough time to get my gear together and my barracks bag put away, and the tents dropped, we're moved to the air strip where we don chutes and make ready for the jump on Negros.

There are some new faces around me, and they make me feel like an old pro.

I make the time about 7 AM. There's the usual undercurrent of tension as we load on to the planes and taxi, which the take-off doesn't do anything to relieve. All is normal, and I am praying once again that my personal angel is at my side protecting me, as before. But there is something occurring on the aircraft though which is not usual. After about a half hour in flight the jumpmaster announces that the jump is off. The tension recedes but not for long, for his next words are,

"Remove your chutes! Leave them on the plane, we are landing at Iloilo on the island of Panay and we will move to Negros by boat."



Iloilo docks, en route to Negros, P.I.

Arriving on Negros we board trucks and head out I know not where. The ride to our destination is quite lengthy and we move through grassy hills and across beautiful rivers until we reach the town of Bacolod, where we proceed through the town and headed up toward the high ground we can see in the distance. The rocking of the truck settles me down, as does the constant noise, and as soon as the noise runs out, I wake. The road we were on is dirt but shows no heavy signs of traffic. There is some milling around at the unloading point, and much shouting of orders. Once again I hear the order I have learned to dread, the scouting team's introduction, ***"NYCUM, TAKE THE POINT!"***

I breathe one more prayer and move out at a careful pace, heading toward the high ground.

So began Negros.

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. "Negros was a tough campaign, every bit worse than Corregidor, in almost every respect. Worst thing of all, it became a forgotten tragedy, dismissed by the insult of calling it a 'mopping-up' action."

**Paul Whitman
503rd Heritage Battalion.**

My senses bristle, but I move about a quarter mile up the road before I pause to look back to see how far my second scout is behind me. Andy Pacella is following me at about 100 ft. All is well, God is in his heaven, my angel is with me and I continue on.

A short time later I can see a wall with an arched opening, and within the opening I can see people peeking out at me. As I approached, they appear to be Filipino kids, and as I get closer they disappear somewhere behind the wall, as I reach a point in front of the opening.

I am alive today because of a disproportionate amount of good fortune, a good fighting team with me always, and a talent for noticing whatever is unusual in a natural setting. The latter, which the Aussies called "tracking, mate" meant looking for the unnatural, a skill taught me by Umberto Poppi, my good Aussie friend. Anything which had been disturbed in nature tends to leave

something unnatural, an unusual angle about it, something different, and skill in tracking was noticing whatever looked unnatural.

As I reach a point in front of the opening I notice a small mound of sand, off center of the road. It does not look natural to me, and I signal to Andy to come up, and point it out to him. He will, in turn, direct the others away from it. In my mind it has to be a land mine, and I treat it that way. Moving on about a hundred feet there is another small sand pile on the opposite side of the road. The mines are planted to take our tanks or trucks.

I have moved us about three miles before I am directed to move off the road to the right, crossing into a shallow valley and then up on a hogback ridge running to the top of a domed shaped hill. This valley is covered with heavy tropical growth, typical bush, trees, brush and jungle vines. We move into position around the hill, and settle in for nightfall. My position is about three foxholes to the right of a machine gun which is located to fire directly down the trail we have just traversed. I am actually in the rear, and looking down on the trail we had just came up. We dig in for the night, with our foxhole just deep enough to allow the three of us in the hole to lay prone and fire, with only our heads above ground. When I had first learned the soldier's craft, there were two to a foxhole, so that one could always remain awake. Experience eventually taught us that individual fatigue was less with three to a hole. Actually we felt pretty safe for the night, knowing we were not on the front line, and settled in. It was a very quiet night, field discipline was tight, and there were no sporadic firings, just silence, for some hours.

Suddenly the force of an explosion shatters the quiet, making the skin on my entire body seem to shrink, for it has occurred directly in front of us, but a few merciful yards short. Without a wristwatch, I can only estimate it is about three o'clock in the morning, as I tense and begin the wait. Never has a group of men been more alert nor more on edge. I lay on my left hip with my Tommy gun at the ready, shaking not from any cold but from stark fear and anxiety. We wait, and I shiver for almost two hours.

The noise and concussion in the air instantly herald the arrival at our perimeter of grenades and mortars, and within seconds Japs wearing camouflage rise up in front of us like shadows, fighting with whatever they had. They are so close upon us that there's very little time to fire, and our machine gun never opens up. I glance and see our BAR man Joe Syracuse standing, shoving a Jap away from him with the barrel of the gun.

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Apparently he has been caught with the safety still engaged on the gun. McLemore, in the hole next to me, cuts the Jap down with a shot from his rifle.

I fire bursts of three, trying to concentrate my fire toward the trail and at a point about three feet off the ground. (Bursts of three is the minimum I could fire, due to the speed of the bolt. Longer bursts brought a risk of missing the target, as the gun had a tendency to climb to the right. Some fellows claimed a skill of being able to fire single rounds with accuracy, though I have difficulty believing that). I exhaust my first clip, and replace it with another. It too becomes empty, and yet I do not realize how long this contact has lasted. Yet it seems that it is over almost as soon as it started, and dawn comes eventually. With the light, we can now move. I stand and realize that I have developed a sore on my left hip, from shaking so hard and for so long in the wet mud of the foxhole. The others are out of their foxholes, trying to piece together what has happened and who needs help.



The Tokaldo Road begins, Negros P.I.

Over there are several Jap bodies laying where they fell, but here is one of our own men who is beyond help. Having given in to panic, he broke our cardinal *'no movement at night'* rule and attempted to fall back to an adjacent foxhole. He has been killed by a trooper, who thought his position was being stormed by an attacking son of Nippon. His body lays desperately sprawled, with his head and shoulders face down in the foxhole he was trying to get into. As we are viewing the bodies, and thanking our personal gods that our buddies are not looking down at us, one of our men happens upon the scene and remarks callously, to no one in particular, *"Look at this Bastard,"* pointing to our man.

Three troopers grab him, and only a penitent apology saves him an early morning meal of his own words being shoved down his throat. The trooper expressed his sorrow for his mistake in identifying the victim, and the incident soon passes.

A tally is made, and 'the score' is passed around in hushes and whispers - seven troopers and seven dead Japs.

As we continue surveying the situation, attempting to rationalize our personal survivals, our medic walks over to the Jap bodies and spots a well kept fellow with well trimmed sideburns, moustache and goatee, laying flat on his back. With his trench knife in hand, he reaches down and flicks the knife through the Jap's goatee. At this, he notices a pulse beating on the Japs neck. *"Look at this SOB."* He dropped down, putting his knee on the Jap's chest and presses his trench knife against the Japs throat. The Jap starts calling, and waving his arms about, and the medic, plunges the knife through the fellow's Adam's apple and into his spine, giving it a twist. *"Now the score is even,"* he pronounces finally.

To this day I do not know who set the booby trap that exploded at the start of this incident. I was told some time later that some enterprising troopers had dug up the mines that I had spotted earlier on the road and somehow moved one to the spot just below our position. What I thought was a mine had turned out to be a 500 lb. bomb with 40 lb. detonator. A grenade was tied to the detonator and a trip wire was stretched across the trail. Whoever was responsible for turning that bomb into a booby trap, saved my life and many others on that perimeter. After the attack and the anger subsided I went down the trail to look at the area where the bomb exploded. There I could see many blood trails where the wounded crawled or were carried away. Only seven had survived to attack our line.

It is at this point that I shall describe the terrain we are crossing as we press the attack.

We are continuously moving up hill on a grassy plain and our path is made more difficult by hills that continue to extend across our front like giant fingers gripping the earth. They disappear into the ground to our left and grow higher to our right. It is the perfect place for snipers to pick off our men as we press the attack across the top of a finger. From our rear there are steep and deep gullies extending towards these hills, made deeper by years of tropical rains.

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Even digging in for the night or arising in the morning we must remember to stay below the military crest of our hill, for the peril of sniper fire is always with us. Even if one can't admire the skill of the snipers, you had to respect their patience.

I soon fall into a timeless state of mind, where time ceases to exist in any continuous line, and instead runs through my memories as a series of short episodes, perhaps strung together with a common thread of emotion. I cannot describe the action on an individual day, for time is now become lost, and only singular events make it possible for me to continue.

We are moved to our right across a wide gully and up on to a hogback ridge, along a well worn trail. I am the lead man as we start to move up toward the higher ground. Moving about 300 yds. up the trail, the ground erupts no more than three feet to my rear, with a sound from the gully like no other gun I know of. I hit the ground and roll off the trail and lay there waiting but no other shots were fired. Orders come to me to hold my position while a squad goes down into the gully to silence the gun. A short time later, word comes that the gun they have destroyed was an aircraft machine gun positioned to cover the trail, fired remotely by a wire. No Japs were found.



Chet and buddy in jungle.

After this incident and having spent sufficient time on the point, I am rotated and moved to the rear of the column, the second scout always taking the last man position. It is a comforting feeling to me to know Andy Pacella is watching my back. He was my second scout throughout all the missions.

After we advance for some distance, I am called on to take two men and carry a wounded Lieutenant back to base camp on the other side of the gully. The Lieutenant has a gunshot wound across the back of his neck. During the trip down the ridge one of the carriers stumbles and I warn him to be more careful. The Lieutenant tells me it's OK, not to worry, "because I

can't feel a thing." We continue carrying him to base camp, and when the medics come over to look at him they pronounce him dead, I feel hit by a thunderbolt. Apparently the bullet had hit his spine. I didn't even hear him leave.

Returning to the front I find that we are starting an advance across a wide basin. Trees rim the basin to our front and to our right. We spread out across the basin and start the assault. As we are about half way to the tree line in front of us, machine guns started firing. All of us to a man hit the grass and lay prone, trying to flatten our bodies as low to the ground as possible. Laying there I can see tracers passing just a few feet over us. It then dawns on me that the Japs have dug their guns into a position where they can't lower them sufficiently to rake the bottom of the basin. Our rifle grenadier, in the stress of the moment, attempts to fire a grenade and forgets to put a blank cartridge in his rifle prior to firing. The rifle explodes and shrapnel wounds pepper his back.

I felt we can roll out of the basin and started to do this. I am rolling out but as I do, I see the man next to me laying on his back with his legs sticking straight up in the air. "Get your damn legs down!" I call at him. "F... You! Mind your own f...ing business!" He is looking for a "homer" and taking a bullet in the leg is as good as any. He is not the only one that day, and I question myself whether this is the spirit of the unit I came back from Hollandia to go into battle with. Perhaps amongst these few old timers, on their fifth campaign, the odds of living seem that much shorter with each new day of combat. Was I the crazy one or were they? The question is with me still, unanswered.

In a short while two tanks show up, positioning themselves between us and the Nips. They then slowly walked us out of the predicament we had gotten into.

As I move away from the tank and into safe cover I come upon Malone, our grenadier, laying on a stretcher grinning like a fox eating grapes. "Hey Nyk! I got a homer this time!" Accidentally chambering a live round instead of a blank in a .03 is a hell of a way to fire a grenade, *or* get a homer.

After reassembling, Lt. Marshall comes to me and instructs me to take the squad and wade a stream that flows from the rear of the Jap gun emplacements and on down past our right flank. I move to the stream and wade in. The water is about knee deep initially but gets deeper in places as I progress toward the turn to the left. The turn will put me directly behind the guns.

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Water is now at upper chest level, and there is a large boulder just ahead of me at the point where the stream turns left. I move cautiously to the boulder, with only another few feet to a point where I will be able to see around the bend. The guns are quiet but my heart is beating just as loudly.

Lt. Marshall calls **"OK NYCUM! THAT'S FAR ENOUGH!"**

Well that did it for me and the Japs. I could hear the guns falling down the cliff ahead of me so I push through the water hoping to get the guns, but as I make the turn there is no one, and the guns may be in the water. The job is done and the guns are no longer a threat, and there was no need for my pushing those few feet out of safety to find out. I am totally disgusted. Why I had to take that risk, I will never understand. When the tanks showed up to rescue us, they could just as easily have knocked out the machine guns. But Hell! Then we would have no casualties, and no medal on the commander's chest for our accomplishment!

Again I am on the point, this time I am approaching a hill that runs across my front. We are receiving artillery fire from a forest covered area further out to my front, and lucky for me the shells are bursting to my rear. As I reach the military crest of the hill I am surprised by a loud roar directly overhead. I dive to the ground and roll on to my back to see what it is. To my surprise a B-25 Mitchell has passed over me, not more than 100 ft off the ground, with all guns firing. Looking at his direction of travel I realize he's used me to line up on the target! I don't know what scared me most -- the racket of twin radials and multiple .50 cal's, or my short career as a target marker.

Recovering my composure, and then my concentration, I move forward where we come under mortar fire. As scout, I figure somebody has to be in front, and am used to the company being spread out in the valley behind me. A trooper named Getchell is passing grenades up to me and I am tossing them over the crest at whatever may be there. I am having no luck reducing the intensity of the mortar barrage, and am calling back for more grenades.

A trooper slides up beside me. He looks over at me, rises into a crouch, gestures ahead of us and calls *"Come on! Lets get em!"* Oh God in heaven, it's Maxie! I start to rise with him, but instantly there is a sound much like a bass drum, and Maxie falls to the ground as if swatted by a giant hand.

"There must be mucho Japs over there..." he says as he looks at me.



Chet (R) and his good buddy, Maxie, KIA on Negros.

We get the command to pull back, and I turn to Maxie and say *"Go!"* thinking he heard the command, but Maxie does not move. I roll myself over to his side and pull him onto his back. I can see blood on his right side and that his eyes have rolled back until only the whites are showing. I called to Getchel to help me carry Maxie back, and though everyone else had moved back, Getchel shows great courage in staying close to me. Getchel takes Maxie's legs and I take his shoulders, and we carried him back through the mortar fire. Getting him to the safety of our line, he is pronounced dead, and I am shattered. My closest friend is gone and I am feeling enough rage to take on the whole damn Jap army, but opportunity and good sense hold me back. Maxie was hit just below the right shoulder and the bullet exited out his left side in the area of the lower rib.

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Later we find a Jap trench that terminates in a tunnel that allows the defenders to locate a machine gun or individually fire from cover.

As I move among the men trying to learn if any others are hit I see a man standing at attention in front of a Lieutenant. I figured he's getting raked over the coals for something, as I near them the Lieutenant slaps the trooper across the face, a resounding broad handed rebuke with the palm of the hand. I have had more than enough at this point, and such conduct I will not stand for, even by a Lieutenant. I charge up to the pair shouting "*Don't hit him again!*" The Lieutenant steps back, shocked, I expect, to hear such words from a private. He turns immediately towards me, steps back a mite to regain some space between us, and cautions me "*Hold it!*"

"*This is the way a man shows fear!*" he says to me, gesturing at the same time to the trooper, who is rock solid and has not moved.

"*If he were a woman he would be screaming!*" I look at the trooper, who is not steadfast, but absolutely helpless and totally incapable of moving or speaking. The Lieutenant says it is sometimes possible to shock a man out of that state by slapping him.

It did not work for this man.

We spend the rest of the day trying to spot snipers, and keeping our heads down.

Late that same afternoon we see a flight of four Marine Corsairs coming in, as beautiful as their name suggests. The first plane makes a pass at the Jap positions, and as he pulls up the Jap ack ack hits him and he goes down behind enemy lines. The second plane makes his run and he too is hit.

Fortunately, after dropping his bombs, he turns towards our lines and bails out, hitting the ground about halfway between us and the Jap positions. Everyone opens up with everything we have to cover him, and he makes a run towards our line. No football game or Olympic race was ever so exciting, and he falls into the closest foxhole he can find. No 503d guest was more welcome, nor arrived with a more exciting introduction, nor had a more dangerous night.

The last two Corsairs come in together, drop their bombs and turn toward us. Neither looks to have been hit, but the second plane had a bomb hanging from the shackles under its starboard wing. We see the pilot working desperately to free it as he heads back toward our lines, when the bomb shakes loose and falls in the direction of the C.P. and a convoy of trucks bringing in replacements.

I am told that 12 or 13 men are killed. The mood amongst those who know of the episode is sombre, generally summarized by one comment that I heard passed, "*The poor guys, they didn't even get a chance to get into the fight.*"

As night conceals us, there is no moon and no starlight, just pitch black. Fear, tension and anxiety come to me again, for where we are tonight we can expect them to come to us. We're too much of a challenge, too much of a target to be left alone.

The attack opens with the mortars falling, and the waves of Japs soon follow, charging at our line, yelling and firing, the sounds so close I can hear rifle bolts slamming rounds into their chambers. How long it lasts, how much ammo I expend, how I stay alive, I have no recollection. My universe has contracted to the point where I am aware only of my own actions, and those of the men immediately around me. How we fight, whether we fought well or badly, we shall have time to think of that later. The line holds, and we are then the unwilling audience to the sounds and the cries of the dying. One man out in front of my position keeps crying "*Melikan die!*" and for some reason I do not consider him worth a grenade, so I put up with the irritation.

Morning comes and all is quiet. Still as it might be, none of us will challenge the patience of the snipers by raising our heads over the crest of the hill, for we've learned that the Japs leave snipers behind to get in the last word. Well after sunrise, when I do feel it sufficiently safe to steal a look towards no man's land, there are no dead or wounded to be seen. Silently and skillfully, the Japs have quietly collected their dead and wounded comrades.

**Our Marine pilot, rising from
the foxhole, can be heard
swearing to one and all that he
will gladly ride the next plane to
hell before he will spend another
night on the front line.**

Our activity changes and we are now sending out patrols to try and locate any enemy that may be a hazard to our advance.

(continued....)



The Japanese in their clever way, take the opportunity to move after dark to the sloping face of a grass covered hill, dig in and wait for daylight. Dawn comes and, though you think there might be some way to avoid it, the first man that ventured beyond the crest of the hill is killed. We immediately take firing positions and begin to try to spot the hidden Japs. It's relatively easy to spot them if one wants to become a target in target practice, but there's no future in it. Over to my left a machine gun opens up, sending out a stream of "to whom it may concern" greetings to no fixed address. Firing on dug in troops is often a wasted effort, but today someone is smiling on us. Tracer shells firing into the grass hiding the Japs caused the grass to burn, and it is not long before we have a raging fire covering the hill ahead of us. Japs are jumping up, trying to put out the fire, or to evade it and we were having a turkey shoot. A hell of a way to have fun, but we surely enjoyed the morning's good fortune.

Having cleared the Japs from the hill we begin patrolling the wide expanse of grassland in front of us. Progress is good for a time and there appears to be no opposition until I lead our patrol over to our extreme left, and a machine gun opened up upon us. We hit the ground and slide away from the gun on our bellies. Estimating the distance to the gun from our position, I judge it to be well over 300 yards. We are about a 1000 yards from our perimeter and in no position to take that gun, so we returned to our lines, to report the location of the gun. I try hard to show it to the Lieutenant, but he just can't make it out, and tells me he will call for a sniper.

"A sniper!" I laugh to myself as I walked back to my squad, where a few words to them shares the amusement, and soon we are all smiling broadly. We have nothing much of anything happening for a while, and there is much mocking as to just who is going to be our saviour sniper.

It was not too long before we see a bulldozer making its way towards us, dragging a long barrelled cannon. Someone yells "Hey Nyk! Here comes your sniper!" and there is now more amusement, but at my expense. I'm not a big guy, but I've got broad shoulders, and can take it.

I soon learn what a 90mm is like. The dozer uses his blade as a shield, and pulls the gun up towards our line, and then sets to work leveling a spot to place it. With

the gun in place they call me over to identify the machine gun emplacement. I stand back of the gun and tell the gunner how to move the gun until we have it pointing in the right direction. The Lieutenant who arrived with the gun is chipper and businesslike, and asks me to see if I can spot the bunker if I looked through the barrel of the 90mm. He opens the breach and I look down that long shiny rifled barrel. The opening looks small but there is ample space for me to line up and tell them how to lower the gun until the target comes into view. The Lieutenant has been following the moves of the gun using a small scope mounted on its left side and as the target comes into view for me he calls "*I've got it!*" I step back from the gun, for my role is about over. He makes a few corrections aiming it, then asked me to look through the small scope and confirm the target. After I confirmed the target he called for a shell. It looked to be at least 4 ft. long and has a yellow tip, which the Lieutenant tells me means high explosive (H.E.). The gun is fired, I see the hit, and surprisingly the Jap gun opened up in reply. Some of these bushido types just don't know to quit when they're ahead.

The Lieutenant looks at me, sides of his mouth turning down, shoulders shrugging. "*We'll get him,*" he comments, sounding a bit like a mad professor. He orders up another shell, this one not as tall, and with a short short nose. "*What's that one?*" I ask.

"*Armor piercing.*"

They load. I press both hands to the side of my ears as they fire.

There is no response this time, not even when my hearing comes back to me.

Later, as we patrol out to the gun position, we confirmed that neither the machine guns nor the three Japs inside will be giving us any further trouble.

As I rack my mind to put these events in order I feel it was from this position that we are roused in the middle of the night and each man holding to the webbing or a piece of equipment attached to the man in front of him, we move to a new area and told to hold our position and wait for daylight.

As I lay there thinking about the move I determine it had to be to our left. Probably the Japs are flanking us, and daylight might be trouble. Daylight comes without incident, patrols are sent out and we started our advance again.

(continued...)



We are now approaching the mountains, on our left there is a cliff dropping down towards a river. During one of the patrols we locate a well worn trail that comes from our right and extends across our front and uphill away from us. We decided that this will be a good place to ambush Jap patrols.

On our second day out, while hiding in ambush, we spot a patrol of American troops coming from our left. Seeing that they are our troops we break cover, shout and waved to them. They respond by opening up on us. We yelled at them and they take off running. We did not give chase.

Though Sgt. Guthrie (footnote S/Sgt. John M Guthrie - KIA 22 May 1945, received no medal other than a purple heart, to my knowledge) is not hit, but he has a hand grenade shot loose from his webbing, and everyone hears the detonator fire, and hits the ground as far away from it as we can. Sgt Guthrie in the bravest and most selfless act I had ever seen, threw himself on top of the grenade. No one else in his vicinity is wounded, not even a scratch. Even 56 years on, as so many times over the intervening years when I am reminded of it, this event brings me to tears.

Upon reporting this action to our command we are told that what we thought was Americans were really Japs in American clothes. Though it did not occur to me at the time, I wonder where they got their M-1 rifles. I guess this is all part of war.

The next incident occurs late in an afternoon. I am called to the C.P. and *asked* if I would go up and see if I can retrieve one of our men who had been killed.

Assignments such as these are never easy. If a patrol has left a trooper's body somewhere, you can almost guarantee that there is a damn good reason for it. The Japs know we don't leave our buddies behind, and all it takes is one good sniper or a M.G. crew to ruin a guy's whole day.

I should try to describe the terrain I am moving through. It is uphill, on a hogback ridge with typical jungle-like vegetation, a rain forest off to my right and a cliff dropping to the river on my left. I start climbing, my heart pounding. I am extra careful now, finding myself looking for any excuse to turn back, but there is none. I move up to the large tree, as described to me as *the place*. I ease my head around the tree and I can see him curled up on the ground between two large root fins of

the tree, his left arm is stretched out in front of him. I can see that his ring finger has been cut off. I ease myself around the tree and get hold of his fatigues at the shoulders, and as I start to lift him, his head falls against my chest. The odor is almost more than I can stand. I keep pulling but I do not have enough strength to get him over the root of the tree, I cannot and will not expose myself any further. In total frustration I relax and ease him back, not slumped forward but in a sitting position with his back against the tree, and return to our C.P. and report my failure.

We did not dig in this night but spent the night where we were. The following morning I am ordered to lead the way up the hill and try to take the position. It is early morning, I would guess 5 or 6 AM. With a swallow of coffee someone gives me, I start up the trail, proceeding to the tree where our man was killed, and find his body is gone. I reach a point where, with head lowered, I can see over the hill, directly where the Japs are dug in. Cautiously I straighten up to my full height, and I am looking at four Japs. One is an officer wearing a sword, with his back to me, facing three soldiers with their rifles slung on their shoulders.



Chet, 3rd from left in front row, and buddies on Negros.

Without hesitation I fire bursts of three first into the officer and then into each of the three standing soldiers. They each fall as my .45s find their targets. I step higher and strafe their bodies on the ground, to be sure they are not playing dead as I had seen one do before. Worrying about my remaining ammo, I release the 100 drum and replace it with a 20 clip, jack a round into the chamber and started to turn toward the machine gun.

(continued...)



As I start this move I catch movement in the corner of my eye. Spinning to my right, I am looking down the barrel of a Jap rifle.

I know immediately that this is the time of my death, so I do not take time to aim. I just let go a few rounds from where I am, hitting him chest high, and he collapses towards the ground like a bunch of old clothes. Why that soldier hesitated, I will never know.

They say that many a true word is said in jest. Years after the war, when our company was doing business with the Japanese, I overheard a colleague say

"the Japanese are the most polite people I ever met."

**When I agreed with him,
he asked me why, seeing as I'd
been in a war against them.**

I'd formed that opinion.

"They always let me shoot first."

Having made it nearly to the brink of the hill, I now have to concentrate on that damn machine gun, now only about 50 ft. to my right. I ponder how to approach it safely and call for our BAR man, Joe Syracuse, to come up. When he arrives, I tell him to give me cover as I move across toward the gun.

Joe asks, *"Do I have to stick my head up there?"*

"You can't shoot from down there!"

I take a W.P grenade from my webbing, pull the pin with my right hand then hold the handle down as I transfer it to my right hand. I start moving towards the gun emplacement, making it to the top without any problem. At this point I can see the top of the bunker, but I know that I am fully exposed to anyone that is not in the bunker. Suddenly I hear Andy Pacella calling me, and I look towards him, seeing that he's motioning for me to come back. Looking at the troops behind A, I can see that they are moving to the rear. Without knowing what was happening I back down to A. It is at this point I realize that I still have the grenade pin between my teeth and a live one in my hand. He tells me we have been called back. He then removes the pin from my teeth and reinserts it in the grenade.

Together we returned to the C.P.

I reported to Lt. Hewitt, told him of the encounter and he tells me he will recommend me for the Silver Star. That either never happened or Col. Jones did not think I earned it. I didn't realize how the great strain of the encounter was upon me until I sit with Lt. Hewitt and he hands me a canteen cup of coffee. As I reach for the cup I find myself shaking so bad that I cannot hold it to my lips. He takes it and holds it steady while I drink, and lights a cigarette for me. Boy! Did I love *that cigarette!*

Once again we spend the night in the same place. Morning comes and again I am called upon to take the lead. This time our second platoon is assigned the task of moving off to our right and then circling back to the left, staying out of sight of the Japs on the hill for the night, and at daylight to attack them from the rear. I would now for the third time attack from the front.

I lead the way up the same trail we had been on until I was just about to cross the top. Suddenly the Jap machine gun opens up, and I spring forward to get into the fight. As I cross the top, one of the second platoon men waved a caution at me and points to my left, where I see one of our men laying crumpled on the ground. The Japs had moved the gun from the bunker and had it placed ready to fire on the lower left side of the hill. When Karsten Hall, the platoon scout, crossed the top they gunned him down. Neither we or the 2nd platoon men got any of the remaining Japs or the guns.



I wasn't to know it, but this was my last encounter with any Japs. We were moved to Demaguete and made camp in a large corrugated steel building. My duties were to lead patrols around the area and to relieve the men manning a machine gun at the crossroads on the road coming down from the mountains.

(continued...)





The Japanese Surrender, Negros, P.I.



Next stop, POW Camp. Negros, P.I.

challenge Mike. The fight was set for the next day. I had a patrol in the morning, so the fight had to wait until afternoon.

During that patrol, we pass in front of a Spanish-style home, where I am beckoned inside by a charming Spanish gentleman. He has a very cute Filipino girl mix me a drink, which tastes like it's made from Sugar alcohol and bitters, but it is very tasty and does a fine job of making me feel friendly. I am introduced to his Spanish wife, who weighs at least three hundred pounds. This is because, he explains, she has a severe craving for chocolate. Their home is lavishly decorated with Chinese statues, and she proceeds to offer me my choice of anything in the room if I would get her some chocolate. I had no doubt in my mind that these people had to be Japanese collaborators, for there is surely no way any items of value could remain out of Japanese hands during their occupation.

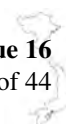
As luck would have it, when I get back to base we have just received a supply of tropical chocolate, so I grab one box and take it to my bunk, hiding it in my blanket to keep it safe until I get back to that family.

Outside Mike is waiting with his rooster. In the Filipino way, we immediately form a circle, there are bets made and insults of roosters passed. A steel blade is strapped to the cock's leg. We then let the birds get acquainted, tossing them in, letting their nature take its course, and witnessing the melee. It is a great fight, all noise, feathers and the glint of sharpened steel, and I think I have it won when Mike's rooster lands on its back. My rooster leaps high with steel spur pointed downward, but before it can strike, Mike's rooster kicks upward driving his blade into the breast of my rooster. Mike's bird wins. Ah, such is the way of the cockfight.

Next day I have another patrol in the same area, which will give me an opportunity to take the chocolate to the Spanish lady. As I approach the home I see the man of the house coming out to greet me. With a big smile he hands me a butterfly knife, a beautiful thing with a caribou carved into the wood. The stiletto-like blade folds into the handle, as the wing-like handles swing around to clip together. We go into the house and I present the chocolate to the lady. She is so excited she cannot speak, and pulls the box apart and removes a chocolate bar, takes a bite and lays back in her chair and allows the candy to melt, smiling and moving her head up and down demonstrating her satisfaction. She motioned for me to take anything in the room I wanted. I hesitated for a bit and then thought, what the hell why not!

(continued....)

Each day was like the one before, except for the entertainment we had fighting roosters. Mike Levack had a rooster and when I found a good one while on patrol, I just could not wait to get back to camp and



I move to a fat bronze Buddha to inspect it more closely, and see it has eyes of Jade. Yes, that is what I want, but when I pick it up I cannot lift it.

I looked around for another object, and spy a carving of a Chinese holy man standing at a dais. He looked like Foo Man Choo, with the long draping moustache, and I walk over and picked it up, not even looking for markings. I just tuck it under my arm, take my leave of them, and go. The woman is too happy enjoying her chocolate almost to notice. Back at my bunk I wrapped the statue in a blanket and stowed it under my blanket.

The following day I have duty on the machine gun. I board the truck and ride to the gun emplacement. It is quiet, in a certain Philippine way, and I am there about an hour before the truck returns with another of our guys. He tells me he has been sent to relieve me, and I ask why.

"You have to get your stuff packed, you're going home."

Boy! He did not need to say any more. I crawled out from behind the gun, grabbed my kit, and climbed the truck.

Getting back to base I start to pack, and J, from one of the squads, says we ought to get some pictures. Good idea, seeing as if I'm leaving and won't see many of them again. Mike Levack now has a camera, I go over to where he's quartered and ask if I could borrow it, and he readily lends it to me. We proceeded to set up for a photo, and just as things are about ready, somebody asks "Nyk, where are your flags?" Now I know why they want pictures, not that they care about me, they just want to pose with the flags. What's it matter, better leave 'em happy, so I race to get them. We hang the garrison flag which Maxie had picked up on Corregidor, and the personal flags I had collected.

Mike takes the first picture, which is of the members in our squad, and as the others get into the act, I take the rest of the series.

The next morning, for me the war is over. I hand my Tommy Gun and the .38 cal. pistol I have carried throughout the war to my replacement (replacement name?). I board a truck with several other men, a Jap prisoner, and a few Taiwanese laborers, for the ride to Bacolod and the ship that will take me home.



Chet, his buddies and bad guy finally heading home.

I do not realize it then, but for me the war did not end that day, or any other. The pieces of shrapnel continued to find their way to the surface of my back clear through into the mid-1950's, and the memories of the deaths of my friends, my colleagues and even those of my enemies all continued to invade my dreams, even until today.

Since the war, many people have asked me what was combat really like, as if a few words from me could put it all into some sort of grand perspective that made sense of it all. What was it really like? All I can tell them is

***Would you really risk understanding
what combat was truly like, if you
knew there was a risk that nightmares
would wake you up for the
rest of your life?*** 🇺🇸

[Photos in this story were provided by Chet Nycum and the 503rd Heritage Battalion, including the Bailey/Calhoun Collections].

Note

Our thanks to 503rd trooper Chet Nycum for sharing with us some of his stories about his time in combat during WWII, and to Paul Whitman, manager of the "503rd Heritage Battalion" web site. As long as the current editor produces our newsletter, we will continue telling the story of the remarkable men of the 503rd PRCT in the Pacific during WWII. Ed.



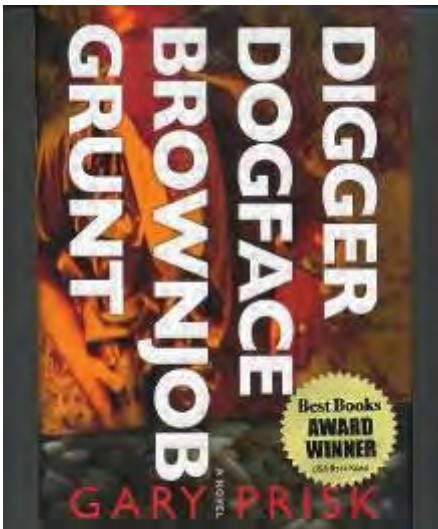


2/503d Dustoff, Operation Marauder, Jan. '66

The 2010 International Book Awards Results

~ GRAND PRIZE ~

Digger, Dogface, Brownjob, Grunt
by Gary Prisk
Cougar Creek Press
978-0-615-25343-5



Gary served as a platoon leader and later a company commander with the 2/503d in '67/'68. His book, about the 2/503d, is available on Amazon.com

~ DUSTOFF ~

Over the years, I have collected many tidbits, some of which may be useful to fill gaps in the newsletter. This is one.

The Army's radio call sign for medical evacuation choppers was "Dustoff." In 1962, the Navy Support Activity in Saigon controlled all radio call signs in South Vietnam. That year, the first Army helicopter evacuation unit to arrive in Vietnam was the 57th Medical Attachment. The 57th's call sign was "Dustoff." From then on all medical evacuation choppers used the call sign followed by a numerical designation. The only exception was the 1st Cavalry Division who used the call sign, "Medevac."

Jerry Hassler
S-2/Recon/2/503d, '66-'67

Thanks Jer. Hell yeah! If there was ever a newsletter which needed gaps filled, this is the one!

NOTE

Please send your 2/503d stories, photos and other information to be shared in our newsletter to rto173d@cfl.rr.com If you served with another 173d unit and have a story involving the 2/503d, it will be very much welcome.

