

CAPTAIN HAROLD HOPKINS
R.N.

*Nice
to
Have
You
Aboard*

A witty, but always authoritative, personal account of the war in the Pacific, 1943 to 1945, by a British naval officer who was attached to the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

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Nice to Have You Aboard

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This is the personal and at times extremely funny record of a naval diplomat's war. After active service in British ships from 1939-43 Captain Hopkins became Royal Naval Liaison Officer to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz U.S.N., Supreme Commander of the Pacific Ocean Areas. As Britain's sea-going observer of the biggest naval war ever fought his advice was invaluable when the Royal Navy entered the Pacific in 1945.

Approaching his new appointment with a certain insular distrust, he was completely won over by the warmth of the reception accorded him. He became a staunch admirer of the courage and efficiency with which the Americans fought.

Captain Hopkins' admiration for America and Americans never lapses into the slavishly uncritical. He has a rare eye for the incongruous and writes with a perception and hilarity not automatically associated with the Silent Service.



1. The author at Cinpac Headquarters, Guam, 1945 *frontispiece*
(Official U.S. Navy photo)

United States Marines

THE 'shipping business' is highly competitive, to say the least of it, and the owners of the good ship *Elmore* must have felt gratified that every berth had been booked for their forthcoming Pacific cruise, from the Hawaiian Islands to an unspecified destination. That the ship was going to be overcrowded, nobody at head office could have denied, but they were endeavouring to forestall the complaints of their clients on this score by ensuring that the meals would be varied and satisfying and, with that object in view, thousands of fresh eggs—to be served 'turned over' or 'sunny side up', as requested—tons of best quality beef and, being an American ship, gallons of ice cream were being embarked. Crisp celery, to be served at luncheon, beans, to be baked 'navy fashion' and crates of Coca Cola, were other items for which provision had to be made, to say nothing of enormous quantities of coffee, outer after outer of chewing gum and, just in case the need arose, an adequate supply of contraceptives.

For the entertainment of the passengers, a comprehensive 'sports' programme—compulsory—had been devised and even before the passengers had embarked, the chairman of the sports committee had been appointed in the person of a colonel, an influential fellow with much charm, but who was known to the owners as a man who derived much pleasure by watching his fellows touch their toes, execute whip jumps and press ups and double round the decks under the tropical, noonday sun.

But, perhaps, the ace of spades in the pack of cards which had been 'fixed' to ensure that the cruise would be enjoyed by all, was the assignment of two Captains to *Elmore*—a practice followed by some of the more luxurious, cruise liners in which Captain number one is the conventional type of seaman, who is mainly interested in such mundane affairs as the safety of the ship, deep sea navigation and discipline, while Captain number two is the less orthodox type of officer selected for his good looks

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and sophistication, whose duty it is to amuse and entertain the passengers, whether they happen to be big business executives, film stars or ordinary people who look and act like sheep. In U.S.S. *Elmore*, Captain number one was everything that one would have expected him to be while Captain number two was a charming, black and white spaniel, named Cheerioh.

I had joined *Elmore* a few hours before the main body of passengers arrived and, having been told that it was nice to have me a'board by the Captain and Cheerioh, in their different ways, they were good enough to inform me that I was to be accommodated in their harbour quarters for the duration of the voyage—a comfortable sleeping cabin and a spacious, day cabin. They, they said, would be occupying their sea cabin, in the vicinity of the bridge, but, when circumstances permitted, would come down to their day cabin for meals and hoped that I would join them, in company with three other passengers whom the owners rated as V.I.P.'s and worthy of places at the captain's table—three colonels, they informed me. It was a pity, they hinted, that the company would be all male and, an hour or so later, as I watched the passengers embarking, I, too, felt a tinge of disappointment that some—even if only a few—of the handsome Romeo's milling around the decks hadn't had to be christened Juliet. I didn't voice my thoughts, however, as I felt that such a remark would hurt the feelings of Lieutenant-Colonel Brink, U.S.M.C., the commanding officer of landing team number two of the Twenty-Fourth Marines, who was very proud of his men, every goddam one of them.

U.S.S. *Elmore*, a troop transport manned by naval personnel, formed part of the Northern Attack Force which sortied from Pearl Harbour on January 22, 1944, bound for the enemy-held Marshall Islands and, with the eleven sister transports, cargo vessels, L.S.D.'s, tugs, tankers and other craft needed for a major, amphibious operation, was escorted by a powerful combatant force consisting of three of the old battleships, five cruisers, three escort aircraft carriers and nineteen destroyers and minesweepers. The landing troops embarked in the transports of the Northern Attack Force—including those in *Elmore*—were the Fourth Marine Division and assigned units, under Major-General Schmid, U.S.M.C., who was quartered with Rear-

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Admiral Conolly—in command of the Northern Attack Force—in the joint headquarters ship, U.S.S. *Appalachian*.

Meanwhile, as in the recently concluded Gilbert Islands operations, a Southern Attack Force of similar size and strength to that of the Northern Attack Force, carrying the Seventh Army Division and assigned units, was converging on the Marshall Islands from south Pacific bases, while Vice-Admiral Spruance, in overall command of the whole operation in his cruiser flagship, U.S.S. *Indianapolis*, and his formidable Fifth Fleet, were already bombing and bombarding enemy bases in the vicinity of the Marshall Islands, including the naval base at Truk.

Having spent four, uncomfortable, rather frightening hours in a fortified pill-box, Captain Shoku and the German naval liaison officer had showered, slipped into their kimonos and were now being served their evening meal by Kati-san. The plump girl friend was behind a screen playing an instrument similar to a mandolin, called a samosan.

'Not hungry, Hans?' Shoku enquired of his friend.

'Not very,' Hans lied. 'I'll have a little more saki, Kati-san. Thanks.'

Hans was, indeed, hungry. Fear always made him hungry and who wouldn't have felt frightened after all those hours listening to the screech of dive bombers, the hideous concussions caused by tons of high explosive bombs and the stench from the fumes of the Napalm bombs. What he needed and longed for was a generous helping of *Wiener schnitzel* followed by an outsize portion of *Apfel Strüdel* and not an entire, curled up eel, which was still wriggling. To hell with the honour of the Swastika. He just wouldn't eat any more fish that was partly cooked or raw, he decided. Not so Shoku. He gobbled down his own eel and then Hans' left-overs, just as quickly as he could manipulate his chopsticks.

'After tonight, I shouldn't think the Yanks will have any aircraft left,' Shoku declared. 'We must have shot down hundreds.'

'Fiddlesticks. A few weeks ago, after the last raid, you said the same thing. You also said that nothing ever happened in this bloody awful place. It seems to me that if the fleet put to sea and sank the enemy carriers, then there would be some justification for both of your remarks.'

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Shoku looked hurt, but he continued to speak softly. 'We are trying to entice them to land on Truk. At the right time the fleet will put to sea and then we will annihilate the bastards. It's a ruse, my dear fellow. By the way, the news from Italy doesn't sound too good?'

'That's a ruse, too,' Hans said. 'Oh, for God's sake, Kati-san. Can't you tell your friend to stop playing that bloody banjo. It's getting on my nerves. Tell her to sing something instead.'

'She says she can't sing tonight. She's got cracked lips,' Kati-san explained.

'How did she get cracked lips?' Shoku enquired, solicitously.

'Too much hissing for German boy-san,' Kati-san said, casting a reproving glance at Hans.

Shoku winked. 'You really ought to oblige the girl, Hans.'

'I've told you, I'm a married man,' Hans said, angrily.

The music stopped in the middle of a bar and from behind the screen came the passionate cry of a love-sick rattlesnake. Cracks prevent the lips being elongated sufficiently to reproduce the hiss of a broody cobra.

On the first day at sea, the warriors comprising landing team two of the twenty-fourth Marines were left pretty much to themselves, to settle down. This was, perhaps, *faut de mieux*, rather than scheduled, as a short swell on the starboard bow had twisted the insides of the younger, less experienced gladiators into the shapes of corkscrews. And, no sooner were they, the hard way, becoming acclimatized to this peculiar motion, than the rhythm changed, as the vessel reacted to a long swell on the starboard beam, so that the corkscrews straightened out and began to swing to and fro, to and fro, like pendulums.

The sea, which at this time wasn't cruel but merely teasing, had laid many proud, swashbuckling marines flat, and noble thoughts of the 'Halls of Montezuma' had been replaced by, 'Aw, gee Mom, I guess I'm gonna die'.

Speaking for myself, I had a disturbed night, not because of the motion of the ship, which I enjoy, but because of the heat of the Captain's cabin. It appeared that the 'old man' had not only his cabin scuttles closed on leaving harbour, but the dead-lights screwed down tight and in foetid heat and gloom, we were

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to suffer at mealtimes—and I, who slept in the cabin, was to toss and turn throughout the long nights—for the whole voyage. Another factor contributing to unrestful sleep was that in the captain's mess, we partook of our dinner at 1700 so that by 2000 there was nothing else to do but turn in and by about 0200 the following morning, I was, generally, wide awake and ravenous. On this first night at sea, I tossed and turned until 0300 and then decided that the best thing to do was to write a letter to Emily.

'As an address you will notice that I have put "At Sea", which is all that I am allowed to say.

'You may be surprised to hear that I have joined the marines, in which famous corps I hope to be made an honorary colonel. I seem to remember reading in a newspaper, a little while ago, that Shirley Temple was granted this high rank by the U.S. Marines when she was enchanting young and old alike with the song, "On the good ship Lollipop".

'There is little I can tell you except about my personal affairs and first and foremost, it is very hot. I am writing in the captain's cabin, very early in the morning, with all the scuttles and deadlights closed and the place is like an oven. I tried to find a suitable place on deck, to sleep, but all the available space was "pegged out" by the marines, a good many of whom—the young ones who haven't been to sea before—are *hors de combat*.

'Can you beat it? Dinner in the captain's mess is served at 5 p.m. On my previous jaunts in U.S. ships, we have had dinner at 6 p.m. which, in fact, is the time they eat in the wardroom in this ship, but 5 p.m. is overdoing it, in my opinion. I can only suppose that in the captain's view, anything later than 5 p.m. would be burning the candle at both ends. I wondered how the captain—a heavily-built Southerner, with great charm—would be able to get through the long night on the bridge, having fed so early, but was enlightened when I paid him a visit, just before turning in, by finding him and his delightful black and white cocker spaniel called Cheerioh, stuffing themselves with candy.

'The three marine colonels on board also eat with the captain and I think we are going to be a very happy mess. At present,

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after two meals together, they all find it a bit difficult to understand what I am saying and I have to repeat by "bon mots". But they are all very kind and are doing their best to make me feel at home, especially the captain who has an endless supply of stories about Anglo-American naval relations, up the Yangtze River in pre-war days. One such story is of the British admiral who invited an American admiral, who had only recently arrived on the station, and his wife to dinner. The American admiral accepted and ended his signal with "Admiral and Mrs Smith have a daughter". To which the British admiral replied, "Heartiest congratulations".

This old chestnut was dished up with the soup, celery and crackers and by the time we had worked our way through the steak, which melted in one's mouth, a delicious dessert and had got down to coffee, the stories became a little more of the music hall variety. A story told by one of the colonels, with a delightful drawl, was of a couple of G.I.'s in France, who had been detailed to bury a dead donkey. A chaplain who passed by, by way of making chatty conversation, had told them, "According to the Scriptures, that's an ass". Later on, a truck load of G.I.'s drove past in a truck and the shouted remarks went something like this.

"What you guys diggin'? A fox hole?"

"According to the Scriptures this ain't a fox hole!"

A few days before I left Pearl Harbour, I was sent for by "Soc" McMorris, the Chief of Staff, who asked me why I hadn't attended the forenoon, staff meeting. At first I thought he was crazy as I had never been permitted to attend *any* staff meeting or, indeed, to know much about what was going on. But when he smiled, I realized that this was his way of saying that I had been *accepted* and was now considered as one of the team and not a "security risk". I must say that this has made me very happy and I feel that I can now do my job properly and be of some use. Also, but publish it not in Gath, I am becoming very attached to the American Navy and enjoy working with them.

'The Captain and Cheerioh have now come down for breakfast, so I'll continue this letter, later.'

'Four days have gone by and we are still zig-zagging our-

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selves silly. With nothing much to do, however, I'm learning quite a lot about the Marines and the more I see of them the more I like them.

'An amusing man is a marine lieutenant—in private life the managing editor of a Chicago daily. He keeps me entertained by telling me stories of Al Capone and other eminent Chicago citizens, which makes a change from the everlasting talk of "dames and goils". One veteran of eighteen pointed to a "stork with baby" advertisement in a glossy magazine and said to me quite seriously, "I wish I was at home, manufacturing those". I asked him if he was married and he said, "Nope. But I guess it's a good institution. My Mom and Dad say it is. What do you think, Commander?" I said, "I guess".

'Included in the itinerary is an awful lot of physical jerks and as I am determined to do everything the marines do, you can imagine me stripped to the waist, under the tropical sun, jumping about like a school boy on an iron deck as hot as an oven. One of the exercises we did this morning involved a competition of strength between two people, the idea being to jerk your opponent off his ground by a flick of the forearm and wrist. My opponent, a thin, light stripling, expressed surprise at his constant and easy success. "All other Limey's I've met have had very strong wrists," he told me. "Since I joined the U.S. Navy, mine have been weakened by constant handshaking," I said. Whereupon he jerked me off my ground with such a vicious flick that I fell flat on my face. Ah, youth! Glorious, virile, intolerant youth!

'The only other news, at the moment, is that Cheerioh hates the sound of gunfire and as soon as the alarm rattlers are sounded, comes tearing into the captain's cabin, like a bat out of Hell, and buries his head in his blanket, which is just what I would like to do.'

Kwajalein Atoll, in the Marshalls group, consists of ninety-three small islands situated in the shape of a triangle. At the apex of the triangle are the islands of Roi and Namur, joined together by a sand spit on which a causeway had been constructed, while at the right hand base of the triangle is the island of Kwajalong.

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Access to the lagoon of six hundred and fifty-five square miles, an excellent fleet anchorage, is possible through twenty-five openings in the reef, although only six channels are suitable for the use of big ships. Other atolls in the Marshall groups such as Mille and Maloelap had been made into strong air bases, but Kwajalein, a natural base, was the pivot of the Japanese defences in the central Pacific and the principal naval base of the Marshall Islands.

This information, and a lot more besides, we learnt at briefing meetings as the Northern Attack Force steamed towards the objective. We learnt that, commencing on D minus two, aircraft from the carriers of the Fifth Fleet and cruisers would bombard air bases in the vicinity of the target, such as Maloelap and Wotje, and that on D minus one, while Eniwetok, Maloelap and Wotje would be receiving the same attention, the big, new battleships and their destroyer escorts would be bombarding the islands of Kwajalein atoll, Roi-Namur and Kwajalong, on which the landings were to take place.

The programme for D-day was to be comprehensive, with the ships and aircraft of the Fifth Fleet backed up by the combatant units of the powerful Northern and Southern Attack Force, which by then, would have arrived off Kwajalein. Very heavy bombardments of Roi-Namur and Kwajalong would be executed throughout the day, while these main targets would be bombed, continuously, throughout the night by our aircraft. And while these bombardments were in progress and the other outlying bases were being neutralized, the smaller islands in the vicinity of Roi-Namur and Kwajalong would be occupied from seaward, and field artillery set up.

Colonel Brink, who briefed the officers, explained that the marines of the Northern Attack Force had been allocated Roi and Namur as their objectives, while the soldiers in the Southern Attack Force were to capture Kwajalong. As far as the landing on Roi and Namur were concerned two landing teams of the Twenty-fourth Marines, of which landing team number two in *Elmore* formed a part, would land on Namur, on Green beaches one and two, while two landing teams of the Twenty-third Marines would tackle Roi, from Red beaches one and two. We studied the aerial photographs of Roi-Namur and saw that while

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Roi was cleared of vegetation and almost the whole island covered by the airstrip, Namur was built up with barracks, stores and what, to our cost turned out to be magazines, set amidst palm trees, so that the tactics to be employed on Namur would differ from those used on Roi.

As our long voyage neared its end, a tense feeling pervaded the ship. The men, who had been a carefree, skylarking bunch, seemed to become more thoughtful and serious, while the sergeants became more aggressive, or jocular, depending on their make-up. Weapon training was intensified, kit and equipment mustered, mended and polished and, just to make quite sure that every son of a gun was fighting fit, the periods of physical training were lengthened. In the evenings, more and more men wrote letters home, although, as in any other group of human beings, there were a few who didn't have anybody to write to.

'What outfit are you going to wear, Commander?' Colonel Brink asked me. 'You can't land with marines dressed up in a sailor suit.'

'My friend from Texas has given me a marine battle suit to wear,' I said.

'Doesn't he propose coming with us?'

'It's all right, Colonel, he says it's a spare. As Tex is about a foot taller than I am, I guess a few alterations will be necessary, but, on the whole, I rather fancy myself in it. The foliage in the camouflage cover of my tin hat will lend just that indefinable touch and I think you'll be very proud of me, on the day.'

'Okay. So I'll be proud,' the Colonel said. 'What number are you going to paint on your back?'

'I'm not with you. I'm not in the groove. What do you mean by what *number*?'

The Colonel pursed his lips, as nannies do at bedtime when their little charges ask for just one more story.

'Now see here, Commander. Nobody wears any insignia on operations.'

'That was the trouble at Trafalgar,' I said. 'If Nelson hadn't been wearing his decorations and epaulettes—'

'But the guys have got to know who their leaders are, so we paint numbers on our blouses, on the back, of course. A lieu-

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tenant-colonel rates a seven, a major a six, captains five, sergeants three and so on. Get me?’

‘What happens if you turn round and run away. Don’t the Japs pot at the high numbers?’

‘Marines never turn their backs on the enemy,’ the colonel reminded me.

‘I hope I won’t let the side down.’

‘Which brings me to your particular case. As a commander, you rate a seven, but I guess you can’t have it, and not a three either. You see, if a marine reckoned you were a colonel or a sergeant, he’d expect you to know all the answers. How about a six? You’d be swell as a major.’

‘What does a private paint on his back?’ I enquired.

‘Nothing.’

‘Then that’s what I’ll be, sir. Marine Hopkins, P.F.C. It will be safer,’ and I clicked my heels and saluted my colonel, with a very creditable marine salute.

The troop transports anchored off Kwajalein shortly before dawn on D-day and as the sun came up over the horizon, the bombardments of the various targets commenced, shattering the stillness of the early morning and spoiling the peaceful, beautiful picture which a Pacific atoll presents, particularly at dawn. Watching, from the wing of *Elmore’s* bridge, I thought, for the millionth time, how much I hated war, noise and devastation; how I loathed violence and cruelty; what an awful, bloody mess the world was in and how unmilitary my thoughts were. At the same time, I hoped that every shell and bomb was falling on the right spot, as scheduled, so that our landing on the morrow would be comparatively easy and not a shambles as it was at Tarawa. Unfortunately, at the start, this was not the case, but as the day wore on, the bombarding ships decreased the range and the aircraft spotting reports were more encouraging.

During this busy D-day, I followed the course of the operation by reading the despatches that were coming through. Units of the Twenty-fifth Marines assaulted and occupied the small islands in the vicinity of Roi-Namur and set up field artillery, which was soon joining in the heavy bombardment of the main

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targets. They met very slight opposition on these small islands whose garrisons consisted only of twenty to thirty men. Then our minesweepers entered the lagoon and in spite of the fact that the Marshall Islands had been in the hands of the Japanese for over twenty years and Kwajalein was a main base, they found no boom defence nets in the big ship channels and no minefields. Either the Japanese commander of Kwajalein was negligent, or incompetent, or all their resources were being concentrated on Truk and their south Pacific bases.

In the transports, the marines in their battle kit were mustered, inspected and given last-minute advice before transferring to the landing craft in which, on the morrow, they would make the main assault. Looking down on them from the bridge, it was hard to recognize the cheerful, wisecracking boys—for most of them *were* boys—whom I had got to know and like so well. Now, with the hour for which they had been waiting almost at hand, they looked serious, determined and well disciplined. As if by a wave of a wand, ordinary boys from the Bronx, Seattle, Oklohomia, the deep South, in fact from every corner of the United States, had been transformed into knights in shining armour. Perhaps it was their steel helmets which created the illusion.

That evening the Captain and I dined alone: the cabin seemed less cheerful without the three colonels.

'It's strange that we've had no air raids all day,' I commented.

'I guess our boys have flattened the airfields in most of the other bases within range,' the Captain said. 'They've been giving them hell for weeks.'

'But they must have *some* aircraft left. And what about their fleet? Why do you think they leave us to gobble up their bases without any retaliation?'

'Long may it last,' the Captain said, fervently. 'But I guess we'll get a nasty shock before too long. Perhaps, in this case, we've surprised them by attacking here and by-passing other places on the route. I don't know. But there's one thing I'm sure of, Commander. Before the end, there's going to be a hell of a lot of blood spilt.'

'I hope all goes well tomorrow and that we don't have another Tarawa. As you know, I'm landing with the first flight

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and, strictly between ourselves, I'm beginning to feel butterflies in my tummy.'

The Captain looked at me, long and searchingly. 'You'll be o.k.,' he said. 'Yes, I guess you'll make a swell marine.'

Cheeriah stopped licking a buttered cracker and yawned widely. If he had been able to talk, I felt sure that he would have said, 'Tell *that* to the marines.'

The control boat, which by arrangement had come alongside *Elmore* at dawn to collect me, fussily went about her duties sorting out the myriad landing craft which were to take part in the assault. Soon I recognized familiar faces in some of the craft, members of landing team number two who had followed the bombarding destroyers into the lagoon, the previous afternoon, in L.S.T.'s. The scene reminded me of a gigantic fleet regatta, in which the landing craft forming the different assault waves represented the boats, being lined up for their respective races. Certainly the pageant was as colourful as that of a peacetime sports' day, with yellow buoys marking the starting line, flags fluttering out their signals and a line of destroyers and minesweepers in the background, whose companies would soon—if it had been a regatta—be cheering the efforts of the racing crews. The only real difference to that of a day of festal sport was the noise; a loud, shuddering noise, as the destroyers in the lagoon, the field artillery on nearby islands and the big ships out at sea, discharged tons of high explosive at the smoke-enveloped islands of Roi-Namur, while wave after wave of our aircraft screeched down on the target.

'What sort of a night did you guys have in your L.S.T.?' I shouted, as the control boat passed close to one of the landing craft.

'F— miserable. I guess the f— *Elmore's* better'n this f— tub.'

The meaningless, much used four letter word was being employed by most of the marines, even more frequently than usual, indicating that the men were tensed up, but in good heart. At least, that was my interpretation of the word that morning. A word that, after years of serving in the Royal Navy, I knew could be used to demonstrate that the speaker was a man and not a kid

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any longer; a word which, depending on the circumstances, could express anger, mateyness, sarcasm, admiration or nothing at all; a word which could let everybody else know that the user hadn't got the wind up.

By means of a loud hailer, the captain of the control boat, a young naval officer, was coaxing the landing craft into their positions. 'Number three, back,' he shouted. 'Goddam it, number three! go astern and get into line. Come up, number eight.' And then an aside to me. 'Eight's a bastard. He don' wanna go.'

'It's about time you transferred me,' I said.

'Which wave you goin' in, Commander?'

'First.'

'First wave's not here yet. Goddam it, they're going to be late.'

And late they were, for, with forty-five minutes to go, we received a signal to the effect that the men assigned to the first wave were still in their L.S.T.'s as the amphibious tractors to which they were to have been transferred had been damaged in the secondary assaults the previous day. This necessitated a change of plan, and the second wave was detailed in their place. 'Jees. Whaddya know,' the men of the second wave shouted, when told that theirs was to be the doubtful honour of leading the assault. They also shouted quite a lot of unprintable words, in what appeared to be a good-humoured way. It helped to relieve their tensed-up feelings.

Led by a line of amphibious tanks, the first assault waves started off on their journey to the beaches; a long line of ugly looking craft containing men of the Twenty-third Marines, on the left, for Red one and two beaches on the island of Roi and, on the right, men of the Twenty-fourth Marines for Green one and two beaches on Namur. Indistinguishable from the other marine privates, I crouched up for'ard, close to the ramp, and tried to look as though I was enjoying myself, which was far from being the truth. Happily, I couldn't hear the wild beating of my heart for the din of the vicious bombardment of the islands on which we were soon, with any luck, to set foot.

The destroyers on the flanks were, now, concentrating their fire on the landing beaches and soon we heard the violent

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detonations of the two thousand pound bombs, which had been scheduled to be dropped just prior to the landing. Knowing the orders by heart, I waited for, and soon heard, the sharper cracks of the 37 mm guns of the amphibious tanks leading us, followed by the screaming dives of the fighter aircraft as they tore in to straff the beaches—with orders to regulate their attacks with reference to the position of the landing craft instead of, as at Tarawa, with reference to time. I remember hoping that none of the pilots had woken up that morning with fat heads and that they were keeping their weather eyes open and on our position, as we approached the beach.

With only a short distance to go, the noise was awe-inspiring, but very heartening and it was difficult to imagine that any living thing on the small island ahead of us could survive the punishment that was being handed out. Rockets fired from our own L.V.T.'s now added to the din and indicated that the 'show was about to begin', and I realized, with astonishment, that I no longer felt afraid. I patted the revolver I was carrying on my left hip—I had declined the offer of a rifle—felt, with my hand, the entrenching tool over my right buttock, pulled down my steel helmet and waited for the jerk as we grounded, remembering the order for the day that, 'Speed and violence are the watchwords for the assault'. Personally, as soon as I was over the ramp and clear of the water, I ran 'like a rigger'. Not that I saw any of the enemy, except dead ones, lying grotesquely all over the coral sand, but there were some live ones, cunningly camouflaged, who somehow or other had survived the bombardment and were now enfilading the beach with gunfire.

The first hitch occurred as soon as we were ashore when our amphibious tanks came to a grinding halt on the jungle side of the beach, due to tank traps and trenches, in the direct line of the enemy fire. I heard somebody order, 'Dig in' and I feel no shame in confessing that of all the marines present, I dug faster and more furiously than any of them, but, alas for my peace of mind, not quite deep enough. Lying full-length and face downward in my fox hole, I knew that my head and body were below ground level, except for my buttocks which provided an excellent target. I remember the peculiar sweet, fishy smell of the wet coral sand as I pressed my face into it and prayed that

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when I got up, I would be able to sit down, if and when the opportunity occurred.

The respite in our fox holes was short lived, however, for as soon as it was apparent that the tanks would take a little time to get across the obstructions, the infantry were ordered to advance. Much to my relief, our bombarding ships had silenced the guns firing at the beaches, at least temporarily, and I was able to take stock of what was happening.

My first impression of the island was of complete and utter devastation, caused by the bombardments. The majority of the Japanese garrison, as it turned out, had been killed and a number of the survivors were punch-drunk and offered no resistance, but there still remained resolute bands of men who had survived the terrific ordeal and remained hiding in wrecked block houses fortified machine-gun nests and—on Roi Island—in drain pipes under the airfield, who put up a tremendous, gallant fight. The position by nightfall was that there was strong opposition on the north of Namur, with scattered resistance from other parts of the island, including snipers who were responsible for a number of our casualties. On Roi, a clear airfield, the marines, supported by tanks, quickly overcame the light opposition they encountered.

As a result of the lessons learnt at Harawa, our troops had been equipped with dynamite charges for blowing up obstructions such as block houses and pill boxes, and on Namur this innovation proved to be pretty expensive. Soon after landing, our forward troops encountered what they took to be a strongly fortified building, but which turned out to have been a fully-stocked aircraft torpedo store. The explosion was tremendous and quite large numbers of our troops in the vicinity were killed. Similar tragedies occurred when other smaller, ammunition stores were, inadvertently, demolished. Too many casualties were also sustained from the cross-fire of our own troops, which, in the opinion of a marine colonel on the spot, was due to two causes. Firstly, this was the first time that the troops concerned had been in action and, secondly, the use of too many private firearms, of all descriptions, which a number of the men carried in addition to their service weapons.

Nice to Have You Aboard

During the night, on Namur, the fighting continued, working up to a climax in the northern pocket of resistance at dawn. After that it was a matter of cleaning up the snipers and digging out, literally, the last of the stubborn defenders who either died fighting or, being dazed, were incapable of committing harakari. But nevertheless very few prisoners were taken.

I had spent a hideous night, at one time lost and always frightened, and by dawn of the second day was glad to return to the beaches, where I was given the news as to what had transpired after the assault waves had landed and proceeded in-shore. Snipers and a well-concealed 20 mm gun had made work on the beach precarious, but immediately after the assault troops were clear, the landing of ammunition, fresh water and rations had commenced, with the beach not yet properly under control, at a rate with which the beach party could not compete, resulting in the loss or damage of much valuable equipment. Of necessity, so as not to hold up the landing of the reserve troops, vast quantities of stores were dumped indiscriminately on rubble and wreckage which, in most cases, covered large numbers of dead Japanese and the stench of death and decay was nauseating. Wherever one looked was a bloated corpse, or a part of a corpse, swarming with flies and land crabs. I turned towards the clean, blue sea and vomited.

'Hey, marine. What the hell you think you at, standin' there and doin' nothing? Grab hold of those goddam cases and git 'em out of the way. Git movin', son, or I'll kick your ass between your eyes.'

The violence of this speech stopped me being sick and when I realized that I was the marine who would have to go through life with a pretty funny looking face, unless I took some positive action, I grabbed hold of an ammunition case with alacrity and started on a day's work which would have done credit to a superbly trained weight-lifter. With other members of the beach party, I hauled on ropes, carried stores and shouted, 'Let's go', with the best of them. I was cursed, encouraged and sometimes congratulated on my efforts. I worked, physically, as hard as I had ever worked in my life and with sweat pouring down my face, and covered with dirt, my un-soldierly bearing went unnoticed and I became, for about eight long hours, a United

United States Marines

States Marine, Private First Class, with no number painted on my back. I felt rather pleased with myself, but have no idea as to whether the sergeant considered me a worthy candidate for corporal.

By 1600 on D-day plus two, the island of Namur was secured and 'Old Glory' hoisted. I found Colonel Brink and his staff officers sitting in a ditch, pretty tired, but jubilant. The doctor was covered in blood and I thought that he must have been wounded, but found out that the blood was from the many casualties to whom he had given first aid in the field. He had, the colonel told me, done a magnificent job. We opened our small packs of field rations, but nobody felt inclined to make coffee or scrambled egg powder, so most of us chewed at the sweet flaky chocolate bar that was provided and smoked cigarettes, until we fell asleep.

It was nice to go a'board *Elmore* again, get clean and eat a delicious dinner off a snow white tablecloth in the cheerful company of the Captain and Cheerioh. It was also quite a change to be addressed as 'Commander' instead of 'Hey, marine', although I missed the camaraderie of my battle-stained buddies ashore, even including the sergeants. But I went ashore again the following morning and watched the second phase of the operation; consolidating the position and the building up, out of the ruins, of an advanced base for our own forces.

The first and immediate task was to clear the conglomeration of stores and ammunition not only off the beaches where we had dumped them, but from the sites under which the dead enemy corpses were lying and were now putrefying rapidly.

Slowly but surely a clearing on the beach was made so that the Seabees and their heavy equipment could be landed and with the advent of these efficient, well-trained engineers and artisans, the back-breaking manual labour of the beach parties was, largely, taken over by bulldozers and powerful trucks. As I was to do on many later occasions, I watched these civilians, dressed up in uniforms, at work, with admiration. They never seemed to be daunted by the enormousness or the apparent impossibility of the tasks they were given and, quite often, operated their machines under gunfire. The Seabees played a great and gallant

Nice to Have You Aboard

part in the Pacific war.

For the disposal of the dead, a special party of six hundred men was formed and to enable them to carry out their unpleasant task, they were provided with power-spraying trucks, portable, hand-spraying equipment and stretchers. All corpses were sprayed before lifting and the ground on which they had lain was similarly treated. The bodies were then conveyed by truck to large, common graves, which had been dug by bulldozers, where again they were sprayed with arsenic and covered up. This was a nasty, ghoulis job, which emphasized the futility and beastliness of war, and I felt a surge of pity for the three thousand five hundred men we buried that day—Japanese men, who had died just as bravely as their comrades were to do later, diving out of the skies in their suicide bombers and wasting their own lives and the lives of the sailors in those of our ships which they hit.

Looking through the report I submitted—twenty long years ago—on the battle of Kwajalein, I see that I commented, 'Striking at the heart of the Japanese defences in the central Pacific, while by-passing other, strong bases in the vicinity was a bold move, and one of the reasons for the successful outcome of the operation with so few casualties was that we achieved the element of surprise.'

'The operation was well planned and the sad lessons we had learnt at Tarawa were acted on with excellent results.'

'Many aspects of these island hopping operations still call for improvement, however, such as the beach organization in which, in my opinion, a greater number of experienced officers should be employed. At times in this particular operation, with far too many stores being called for too early, conditions became chaotic. With no resistance from ships or aircraft, this state of affairs was rectified in time to prevent the fighting troops suffering from lack of the supplies they needed, but if an improvement on the beaches is not made and we are subjected to aerial bombardment, as undoubtedly we will be as we draw nearer to Japan, the result may well be disastrous.'

'In conclusion, I would remark that the capture of Kwajalein was a bold operation, brilliantly executed.'

United States Marines

'Goodbye. I wouldn't have missed this for all the tea in China,' I said to Colonel Brink and his officers.

'I'll be seeing you soon. Yes, give me the letter, I'll post it at Pearl,' I said to the enlisted men.

'That guy sure is hep,' I heard one of them say and, as I understood the current slang of the day, I reckoned that I was being paid a compliment. I didn't say anything at the time, but I thought—and from what I have seen and heard of them since the war, still think—that the United States Marines were hep, too; one of the finest fighting forces in the world.