

# PRIVATE JAMES C. COOK

35<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY REGIMENT

OF THE

25<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION

UNIT

TROPIC LIGHTING DIVISION



Figure I Private Cook

I was only 18 years old when I decided to join the Army.

I thought that I was smarter than my mother and father,

plus my school teachers.

## WORLD WAR II

### After boot camp our Platoon was sent to Guadalcanal.

When my platoon arrived at Guadalcanal on the Solomon Island of Vella Lavella, our landing was from landing craft boats and not too bad of a landing. We were able to capture three Japanese prisoners when we landed. Japan had other plans and sent one hundred planes to bomb us. Our US Navy and Air Force were able to shoot down sixty-four planes before they got to the beachhead. It was raining planes that day. Our area was about 300 yards of beach landing, before you got to the forest. When the bombing and machine guns started firing, our platoon started running for the trees. My Lieutenant started yelling to catch our Japanese prisoners, but I couldn't do it because I was way ahead of them running for the jungle. Our platoon stayed on Vella Lavella for 65 days, being bombed and shot at until we secured the area. During many of the days, the Japanese would fly in and out of our radar. We would hear the sound of the air raid horn all day and night. Until you heard the all clear horn, you had to be ready at a moment's notice. The Navy Seabees had to build an airstrip on the island and they were some real smart guys. During the day, they would work on the airstrip and then before nightfall they would take some coral rock and pile it up and put a light on it. When the Japanese planes flew over, they would drop bombs on that spot. Each day the airstrip would get bigger and better, but every night the Navy Seabees would move the pile of coral rock for them to bomb. (This also kept the planes from bombing our guys.) This kept us laughing and laughing at how easy it was to fool the bad guys.

Japan planned a new landing for the Solomon Islands. They sent 75 barges with 100 men on each barge for the retaking of the island. This would make the Japanese outnumbering the US forces three to one. On that day I stood on the beach it would seem you could see 20 miles. I could see in the skyline that day our US Navy PT boats running in/out and around the barges sinking all of the Japanese barges. By the grace of God, not one of the barges made it through thanks to our Navy PT boats. If the Navy hadn't been able to stop the attack, my chances of survival would have been slim.

During our stay at Guadalcanal, I made the most important decision in my life. I asked the Chaplain to baptize me in the Lunga River. There were just ten of us from our platoon that wanted to be baptized that day. As the water flowed over me, it seemed that a great weight was lifted off my shoulders. I was at peace. I knew that the Lord would watch over me or take me home to his house. I put it in the Lord's hands.



**Figure II Cook with hand on steering wheel.**

## **2 Philippines on Luzon Island**

Luzon Island was where our platoon had the first big fight with the Japanese, and it was bad. After our platoon landed, we started walking for two and half days straight. It was around 11:00 p.m. when we put up a roadblock so that the Japanese could not drive out of a town that we had blocked off. We all were tired and ready for just a wink or two, but first you had to dig a foxhole to be safe from snipers or attacks. The enemy thought of a fun way to disturb our sleep, they ran a herd of caribou over us. We had to wait for the morning to attack the town and made it ours!

On one of the many nights that we dug our fox holes, I had dug about half my foxhole when I discovered there was a large ant bed in the bottom. I thought to myself, I can sleep right beside this hole and, if I need to, all I have to do is roll into it for a few minutes. As I was sleeping, the Japanese had some machine guns set-up on us. They started firing and I just rolled into my half dug small hole with the ants. Good thing I only weighed 125 pounds soaking wet. But, that left nothing hanging out. In the morning after all the fighting with the Japanese was over and I got a good look at the landscape around me, I saw all the bushes and small trees were shot down to about six inches. Good thing I had just enough room and was more than happy to share with the ants.



**Figure III Always happy to share.**

One important thing I learned is how much you can do without. The water supply was slim and

everyone got one canteen of water a day. It was your choice what to do with it. Mine was for a cup of coffee (if I could find coffee) and to brush my teeth. The rest was for just drinking. We found a stream of water and the coast was clear. You can bet that my bar of soap came out. I was fully clothed except for my shoes, I ran in to do a quick bath. That was a really great day. All wet, but clean clothes and a clean body!



**Figure IV Blate Pass and Japanese Pill Box**



**Figure V The Gate Way to a Valley in the Philippines**

My job was to shoot an 81 mm mortar gun. Sergeant Clark and I were on the front line, picking out targets to fire on. There was a bridge that we had to cross to get back to our post, but the Japanese had sent in snipers to shoot anyone who tried to cross. We decided to crawl down a ditch within fifty yards of the bridge, and then make a run for it. Sergeant Clark went first and made it to the other side. Then it was my turn; I jumped up and started running full speed. You can bet that was the best running speed I ever made, knowing that someone was trying to shoot me. This was one of the things that I had dreams of for the next two years after that day. A couple of days later, our unit were located on one of four hills in the Caraballo Mountains that were held by our troops. We were told to set up the guns to fire north. A guy from Texas called on the phone to inform us that he had spotted 125 Japanese troops coming out on a target that we had mapped out. My gun crew was fast; we were able to shoot off the first round and before it hit the ground, load 17 more. Boy, we were a hot crew--like lighting--never knowing where we would strike next. Just four days had passed before another attack was launched by the Japanese. We were instructed to point our guns north and lay ground fire. The Japanese sent another group that had moved to the east and now had a U.S. platoon pinned down with gun fire. I made a decision to change my sighting to the east. My gun crew was able to knock out the Japanese gun crews in just five rounds. This was a saving grace for the platoon, rescuing many lives. Due to our quick thinking, the Army gave me a battlefield promotion. I went from private first class to Platoon Sergeant.



**Figure VI The 25th Division at the services for the Dead Heroes.**

Some days after my promotion, we had another hill in the Caraballo Mountains to take. We were stationed across from a Japanese gun crew on the next hill. They were shooting at us and killing many of our boys. Many young men were wounded that day. I had to sit in my foxhole and wait for

our turn to return fire. Shells were hitting everywhere, when one landed at the rim of my foxhole throwing dirt all over me, Thank God, it was a dud. I did a lot of talking to the Lord that day and into the night. Around 2:00 in the morning, I told the Lord, "If you get me out of this mess, I will be your boy from now on." I was at peace, and that was the best sleep I'd had in the last five months on the island.

I was 22 years old, and a veteran with 30 months overseas service, including 230 days in the front lines. We were coming home for the holidays on a combat Troop Transport Ship. On December 25, 1945, at 9:00 a.m., our ship came under the Golden Gate Bridge. The famous movie star Errol Flynn had his yacht stationed nearby for our benefit where we could see it. It had a Santa Claus, some very pretty girls and a band playing the song, "Sentimental Journey," as we went by. There wasn't a dry eye on the boat. What a Christmas present that was!

Sergeant James C. Cook received these ribbons for his tour in the Philippines: the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Asiatic-Pacific Theater Ribbon with two battle stars, a Philippines Liberation Ribbon with one star and the Good Conduct Medal.

My church asked me to tell them some of the things that have happened in my life. Of course, I told them about WWII and never getting hurt, but also that in 1963, I was working for the Civil Service on Eglin AFB, FL out on a bomb test site and was seriously injured resulting in crushed bones and facial disfigurement. In 1967, our home was destroyed by a tornado in Fort Walton Beach, FL and only one child was hurt. One young boy said, "Mr. Cook, you are like a cat that has nine lives! You sure have used up seven of them." I said to the young boy that was because the Lord has taken care of me! Another friend from church said, "If anything happens in the United States, I'm coming to live with you, because you are living at the foot of the cross."

I, James C. Cook, thank the Lord every day for my family, my good health and all of the blessings that come my way.



**Figure VII SGT. JAMES C. COOK**