



Lawrence Sidel

Part I.

I would like to tell the story of the trials and tribulations that a World War II Veteran endured during that time in our Country's history. I believe that people born after that era and even those, who were alive then, could not imagine what conditions were like overseas in the war zones. Rather than write about each combat day I would like to tell about what life was like for the Veteran overseas during WWII. We know that the real Heroes of any war, are those killed in action, badly injured in action or those whose heroism was so unusual that Purple Heart or other very high rated medal was given for a particular action in combat. I served 2 long duty assignments in the Pacific and China during WWII. Also, because of unexplained reason I was returned to the Pacific sans any leave between my 2 overseas assignments. I mention this now to give the people living at this time the knowledge that enlisted personnel during that time and presently were treated much differently, e.g. presently our active duty people in the military usually know their duty assignments 6-12 months in advance. The WW II Veteran did not know what his assignment would be for the next day most of the time. I should have mentioned that I was a Navy Corpsman and I was assigned to the Navy for 3 years and just after my 1st overseas tour was transferred to the Marine Corps for training for combat duty. While in the U.S. between the 1st and 2nd trip overseas I married on September 11, 1944 and we are still married 63+ years later. We had to get married on a weekend pass as I could not get leave, even though I was eligible for a good conduct ribbon. After about 18 months in the Pacific my Commanding Officer recommended me for Officers Candidate School and I was sent back to the U.S.A. When I told my C.O. that I could not possibly complete the required Physical requirements, because of my recent bouts with Denque Fever, undiagnosed fevers and dysentery, he assured me I would receive convalescent leave. In order to arrive early enough to receive leave I joined 17 other Navy personnel

being flown to the States. The Pacific is a vast ocean and in those days in that theatre of war our planes available flew no longer than 12 hour flights. The plane we flew was a sea plane, a PB2Y and we landed after 2 12 hour flights at Canton Island and then Johnston Island. Our 3rd day destination was Pearl Harbor. We were being flown by Military Air Transportation (MATs). The crew were 6 Pan Am employees. Remember the war in the Pacific cover tremendously great distances and these civilians were in great danger of death if captured by the Japs (that's what we called them and worse). On this segment of the flight the Pilot reported engine trouble with one of the two and he was making an emergency landing at Palmyra, a dot of an Island that had a landing strip, a Quonset hut and not anything else, including no trees. We landed in the water and the Pilot taxied the plane right onto the landing strip. The Pilot told us he was leaving us there, but another plane would return for us. The length of this part of the story is important, because it is very relevant to my WW II experience. It is quite evident thus far to young people of today that all the communication available today was not at that time. Telephones, computers with emails and other everyday electrical devices of today was not available to the soldiers then. Ofcourse telephones were around, but average households still did not have it. I could continue with more experience of the delays that prevented me from receiving convalescent leave. Suffice it to say I arrived at the Cadet Training School Columbia University, New York City, on a Sunday night and classes began Monday morning. a big emphasis was placed on the physical aspects of the program, which was too much for me at the time. About a month later I was returned to the Navy with no explanation other than I was not physically able to continue. I did not know that I could not get leave and that I would receive Medical Field Training on my transfer to the Marine Care. Before my transfer to the Marines, as I stated before, my request for leave to get married was refused with no explanation. After my marriage and training with the Marines I was transferred to the Sixth Marine Division, who was training for the invasion of Okinawa on Guadalcanal. My wife and I was separated and did not see each other again for 28 months. When I returned to the States at the end of 1946, my daughter was 19 months old, born June 11. 1945, while I was in combat on Okinawa. Knowing this background history I would lik to describe life in those days in the service. because I do not believe the people born more recently could imagine how different like was then. First one must realize that the Axis Powers Germany and Italy were already at War in Europe and that Japan had been abusing China and the Asian nations for years. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor most Americans did not even know where Pearl Harbor was located, much less that it was such an important Naval Base. However, overnight the average citizen by listening to the radio learned from the President Franklin D. Roosevelt what had happened and how we would be fighting for our very existence, if we did not respond positively. I was 18 years old and not eligible for the draft, which was for the 21 year old male. Next morning I went to the Military recruiting station in New York City as did thousands of young men all over the country. There were so many men volunteering that it took 10 days to get me on active duty on December 18, 1941. After a speeded up boot camp and then Hospital Corps School and about 6 more weeks in service as a Corpsman at the Philadelphia Hospital, I was on my way to the South Pacific. Ofcause we were not aware of our destination. We were a contingent of about 2,500 Sailors. Most of us were, Corpsmen but we had, all kinds of construction people with us, like carpenters, electricians, heavy duty machine operators, etc. Later on in the war the Navy

formed CB's (Construction Battalions). We boarded the first ship that I was ever on and what a surprise. It wasn't even an American ship. It was named the D.M. Brastagi and it was flying a Dutch Flag. Der Majesti Schiff Brastagi was a Dutch Merchant Ship that was converted from a cargo vessel to a troop transport. Their crew was made up of Dutch and Javanese and two of the crew were young teenagers, who were apprenticing. I was on a number of other troop transports later on in the war, but I'll only describe this one, because the life for a trooper on one of these was about the same no matter what ship at that time. Planes were not used for this kind of transport, because the distances involved were so great and the number of troops.

Part II.

This is a continuation of my World War II story. This Dutch Merchant ship was refitted to carry troops instead of cargo and I'll describe living conditions and the voyage to the South Pacific. The cargo holds of which there were five now held cargo in two and the other three carried troops. To accommodate the troops the sleeping arrangement was six to eight bunks high, with the height between them so small that a sleeper's shoulder would touch the one above, if one tried to sleep on his side. Heads (bathrooms) had group showers with only salt water and sinks also had only salt water. There were no urinals or commodes below decks. On the main deck forward toward the bow there were two troughs that were about ten feet apart and they covered about three quarters of the width of the deck from port to starboard. Open sections were on the port side so passage could be made and the troughs on the starboard side were extending out over the side of the ship. Pumps were used to continuously pump a fast heavy rush of seawater through. These troughs were used by sitting on the side and holding on tight to prevent falling backwards into them. All other troop ships I was on had regular toilets below decks, but all had salt water showers and only provided fresh water for drinking. This ship provided only two meals daily so we were very hungry all the time. Sleeping below decks got to be very uncomfortable as the ship headed south toward the equator. There were no air conditioners in those days on these ships. We left under the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and without convoy we zigged and zagged for thirty two days and arrived at a tropical Island that had a city. We found out that the city was Noumea on New Caledonia, a French possession and that we could not land because the Free French and the Vichy French were fighting. The Free French defeated the Vichy French so we began to disembark. For the next week we worked very hard unloading the ship. We were able to move the cargo with a couple of trucks we brought along. A suitable place was found north of the city near the beach and we built a tent hospital that also had a couple of Quonset huts. The Construction Specialists we had with us worked hard and we helped them. Our sleeping quarters were six man tents with dirt floors. The first time it rained the center pole in my tent broke in half in the middle of the night, because we tightened the guide lines too much. We did not have fresh food so we were living on K rations. Also we began to use Spam a lot and that food we began to hate. Some of our men were beginning to get sick with dysentery, and mosquito borne diseases as we did not have mosquito netting and we were exposing ourselves at night with short sleeves. For every man wounded or killed in combat in the Pacific there were seven hospitalized by disease. The only woman we saw for the next year and a half when we left New Caledonia was Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife. She visited us for an hour or so at the tent

hospital we built on Espirito Santos, New Hebrides, in latter part of 1942. She brought a singer by the name of Lanny Ross to entertain us. Our hospital was treating some of the wounded from the Guadalcanal campaign as well as wounded from Naval battles like the Coral Sea. A troop ship the President Coolidge carrying a large contingent of U.S. Army struck a mine entering the port at Espirito and the Captain was able to ground the ship close to shore. The troops were able to wade ashore so that there was no loss of life. There was no combat on this Island, but a couple of times a month a lone Japanese plane would fly over at night and drop a few bombs. I don't think he ever hit anything. but we were forced to sit in our fox holes until the all clear. At night we had a black out every night. Our hospital was built in a coconut grove and we painted the tree trunks white so we would not bump into them at night. One night I was assigned to take care of a Marine Colonel, who was comatose and receiving an IV. This Officer was the Executive Officer of Colonel Carlsen's Second Marine Raider Battalion and his name was James Roosevelt, the eldest son of the President. While stationed on Espirito I had frequent bouts of dysentery and also a couple of mosquito born diseases, Denque Fever and Malaria. We used Quinine to treat Malaria and later on in the war as a prophylactory we took one yellow pill called Atabrine every day. After a while we looked like we had jaundice. It took mail three weeks to get home and we could not write much. We were not allowed to even mention the weather as our Censors were afraid that if the enemy intercepted our mail they could deduct where we were by checking the weather. Our rate of success in World War II treatment of the wounded was not comparable to the present as the only anti bacterial medicine we had were the Sulfa Drugs. Penicillin came into use at the end of the war and the doses were too small to be successful as we didn't know how to use it properly. Even though one is in a war zone and working hard and doing a lot of suffering to support the effort for the defeat of the enemy, he may not be exposed to enemy fire. In the Pacific we had to occupy many islands to keep the Japs from advancing to them. Supply lines were long in the Pacific and these occupied Islands were necessary to support our front lines. Troops on these islands needed entertainment, supplies and all the human needs of combat troops. Whereas the land battles in the Pacific had long periods of no contact, the troops still required all the supplies needed to stay alive and healthy. As the war progressed we learned how to control some of the tropical island diseases. We learned how to control the mosquito population by forming Mosquito Control Units, who sprayed swamps and other water filled ponds with oil, to prevent mosquito larvae from developing into mosquitoes. We were able to pay closer attention to better food hygiene and better drinking water. Boredom can be a moral killer and we had to devise means of entertaining the troops. We were able to get outdoor theatres built. By utilizing the available material such as wood, 50 gallon drums, sheets, tree logs. We were able to build wooden stages with screens on them. A projection booth behind the back of rows of logs on the ground were used for seating the troops. The movies shown were brought in by supply ships and the ship was given those already seen, to be delivered to other islands. Some of the movies were seen over and over again until other pictures were brought to us. We also learned to entertain ourselves with our own talented troops. Many nights during the rainy season our men sat through shows, sitting on the logs dressed in their ponchos and wearing their helmets to protect themselves from heavy rains. There was one night where the rain was so heavy the whole stage and screen with it was carried away in a "river" of water. While I was on Espirito Santos the USO did not get

there, but I know they visited many other places. Later on in the War food rations improved. More of a variety was provided by "C" and "10 in 1" rations. One box could feed a whole day's meals to 10 men, and a day or more could be carried in our field packs. There were many things that were missed living in a tropical island, but one of the real big ones was ice and cold drinks. Drinking warm water out of a Lister bag was no fun. A Lister bag, for our younger generation, was a large canvas bag supported by tripod poles driven into the earth. Also missed very much was not being able to sit in a chair, especially an "Easy Chair". Of course sleeping in tents on cots was no fun, but it was great improvement over sleeping in muddy fox holes.

Part III.

When I left the States the second time, this time with the 33rd Replacement Draft (Marine Corps), we left Camp Pendleton for San Diego. We boarded a U.S. Navy APA (Auxiliary Personnel Attack). Living conditions were not much better than the Dutch ship except that we were fed 3 meals daily. Still no fresh water for showering, washing of clothes, etc. I can't remember how long it took this time to arrive at our destination, but I'm sure it was about 25 or more. On the first voyage I remember we had the initiation for crossing the equator, "Shell Back" was imprinted in my mind, but I can't remember this one, but I'm sure we had one. Going from "Pollywog" to "Shell Back" was a big Navy thing. We arrived at Guadalcanal, where the Sixth Marine Division was training for a combat mission and we joined them. We weren't told anything, but we assumed we would replace and join units in combat. I believe this was the end of 1944 or the beginning of 45. We trained hard for a few months and some of it was boarding an APA everyday and climbing down a cargo net into a landing craft. One day toward the end of our stay on Guadalcanal we had briefings, where we were shown a map of an island and the landing beaches were shown. We were not told the name of the island until the morning of the actual landing. We boarded the ship as did the rest of the Division, probably about 18-20,000 men. We joined other ships that stretched out over the horizon. Later on we found out that there were 1500 ships and that it was even larger than the "D" Day one in Europe. After a number of days, we were told that we were to be let off the ship for recreation, on an island called Mog Mog, Ulithia. On the island they fed us like we were visiting McDonalds today with all kinds of cold drinks, no liquor and we played ball or just walked around or rested. Back to the ship we left the next day. A few days later we passed Iwo Jima, where the fighting ended not too long before. A few days later we arrived at our destination, when we were finally told that the large island was Okinawa Shima, one of Japan's home islands. A large number of Navy Battleships, Cruisers, Destroyers and other supporting vessels were shelling the island and we were told they had been firing at the island for about 30 days. The next morning we were awakened very early and we lined up for chow and were given hot coffee and steak sandwiches. Everything was very orderly. We had trained aboard this very ship and we knew exactly where and with whom we were to go down the cargo nets into the landing craft. We went into the beach and when we were about 2-3 miles from out we transferred to amphibious tractors that took us over the coral reefs that surrounded the island. We were surprised that there was no Japanese resistance on the beaches. The Japanese defended their island by forming a defensive line across the southern part of Okinawa, this defensive line "Naha, Shuri, Yonabara" was connected by many tunnels and the terrain

around this line was higher than the surrounding land and had well entrenched troops in many caves. They even had an 8 inch naval gun on tracks in one of these caves that we had trouble to put out of commission. After a few days of much success all over the island we ran into much opposition. It took us 82 days to finally capture the Island. We landed on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945 and fighting ended on June 22, 1945. It was the largest battle in the Pacific. The Sixth Marine Division captured 64% of the island. The Sixth Division was part of the 10 Army Corps that was made up 4 Army and three Marine Divisions. There were 125,000 Japanese troops of which 115,000 were killed or missing and it is estimated that over 100,000 Okinawans were killed. The Japanese lost about 4,000 Kamikazi planes trying to sink our ships and they successfully hit 300 and sunk 30. We even lost the Commanding General of the 10 Army Corps, Lieutenant General --Bolivar Bruckner(1st name?), who was hit on June 22, the last day of combat in the front lines of the 22 nd Marine Regiment, Sixth Marine Division. As a Replacement Draft member, I was transferred around to replace corpsmen killed, wounded or missing. We had 55% casualties in our division and the other divisions had high casualty figures also. We left Okinawa and sailed for Guam at the beginning of July, 1945.

Part IV.

When I arrived at Guam from our combat duty on Okinawa during the first week of July 1945, I still had about 29 months to serve of a 6 year enlistment. Remember I enlisted in December 1941 a few days after the Pearl Harbor attack. I don't remember much about Guam, except that a very neat tent camp was ready for us and that our sea bag with all our worldly goods was in my assigned 6 man tent waiting for me. We were issued new field uniforms (combat) and in a few days we were again doing field training. Then one night we were awakened by loud speakers blaring and lights that made our camp almost as light as daytime shining down at us. News blaring at us informed us that an atomic bomb was dropped on a Japanese city and that it obliterated everything for miles. President Truman had informed the Government of Japan that they must surrender or more bombs would destroy their country. We did not know what an atomic bomb was, but we realized it was devastating and was going to end the war quickly. We were in our skivies (underwear) standing outside our tents and we became hysterically happy. We were hugging each other and yelling and carrying on. Our lives were to be spared. We knew we were going to attack the Japanese homeland and we expected great numbers of dead and wounded. Now our lives were to be spared. Then happening rapidly, the 2nd bomb was dropped and Emperor Hirohito informed his troops and his citizens that they were surrendering. In rapid order our reserve troops would be sent back to the States if they had enough combat and overseas points. The regular Marines and Navy troops would not go home, but would remain overseas, to perform those required duties at the end of a war. We were issued more new equipment, even dress uniforms and we were hustled aboard ships. We did not know where we were going until we were well at sea and then we heard that a surrender ceremony was to take place aboard the Battleship U.S.S. Missouri. The Sixth Marine Division with the 22nd and 29th Regiments and all the supporting elements, except the 4th Regiment were on the way to north China. The 4th Regiment was on the way to Japan to claim their flag, which they lost to the Japanese forces at the beginning of the war. We were on bgnhmjkmk, APA's(Auxillary

Personnel Attack), which were "Liberty Ships" built by Henry Kaiser. They were 12,000 ton ships (displacement weight). While in the China sea our convoy had to separate, because a typhoon struck and we were tossed around for 3 days like a toy. Our troops, nearly all became violently sea sick that lasted the 3-4 days we were tossed around. Puke filled the whole ship. No coffee or any other liquids that normally was made in the large vats could not be, because the ship rolled too violently to contain the liquid in them. We finally arrived in a port city 100 miles from the sea up some river. The city was famous for its beer Tsingtao. The city did not look typically Chinese, but here and there was a Pagoda or a Chinese looking structure. We saw rickshaws and wagons being pulled by Chinese. Every once in a while a motorized vehicle using coal and water power passed. We saw a lot of homeless people and children, who were starving. This was the first civilized city some of us were exposed to in a long time and many of the Marines and other personnel were soon suffering with venereal disease. As a Medical Corpsman I played a big part in trying to protect. We learned that the Japanese had great influence in this area since World War I, when they replaced the Germans there and built up large commercial ventures. Large numbers of Japanese civilians and their families lived here and were even born here. We learned that there were a million Japanese Army troops in North China and they needed to surrender. The Chinese Nationalists were sending their 8th Army from Shanghai to help us accept the Japanese surrender. It was now about the middle of September, 1945 and they were marching to Tsingtao. It took them well toward the end of October before they arrived. The Japanese civilians were scarcely to be seen. For one thing they were afraid that the American troops would harm them and the Chinese were now abusing them to get even for all the years of abuse they endured. The hungry Chinese now began to beg us for food. They located and waited at the mess where we emptied our trays right into their hands, or into their cans. When they became a big nuisance our Officers would not let them on our compounds any longer. They then just waited at the dumps where our garbage trucks dumped the garbage and they dug through all the debris for food to eat. We soon learned what our real job was in North China and that was to repatriate all the military forces and all the civilians to Japan. The government of China decreed that no Japanese national could remain in China, even those born there. The 2nd Marine Division was in Tientsin and I think their objective was the same as ours. The Catholic diocese in North China was in Tsingtao and Japanese Catholics were walking there from all of North China and many of them were abused and injured on the way. I got permission to treat their injured and worked with a Japanese Catholic Priest named Bernard Seki, who invited me to lunch with Bishop Thomas Tien one day. This Thomas Tien was called to Rome in 1946 and received his red cap and became the first Chinese Cardinal. The Japanese, some were very wealthy, could not take their wealth with them. They were allowed to take only \$7.00 per person. We used LST's to transport these Japanese and all their troops back to Japan. Either late 1946 or early 1947 we had to leave, because the Communist forces in North China had gained the upper hand and were now beginning to shoot at us. We left North China on a very large troop transport called the U.S.S. Breckenridge and we sailed through the Panama Canal to Norfolk, Virginia. It took us 32 days it was now, probably the spring of 1947 and my wife and I had not seen each other for 28 months and I saw my daughter, Barbara, for the first time who was now 19 months old and born while I was on Okinawa. I received a 30 day leave and on my return to Camp Lejeune, we immediately embarked for training with

amphibious landings at little Creek, Virginia and then combat training and landings in Vieques, Porto Rico. Ofcause this story is long, but I left out more than I could tell at this time.