

AITAPE, NEW GUINEA

BATTLE AT THE DRINIUMOR RIVER



THE PEACFEFUL LOOKING DRINIUMOR RIVER TURNED INTO A BLOODY WORLD WAR II BATTLE GROUND

I want to insert this description of New Guinea by Bill Garbo

I met Bill Garbo on the Internet. He was with a unit of war dogs attached to the 124th Infantry Regiment and later he was with the 112th Cavalry (dismounted and fighting as Infantry). They were on the Driniumor River along with my 124th Infantry Regiment as well as two other Infantry Regiments. This is his description of the conditions there which is as good as can be written -

The battle of the Driniurnor River in New Guinea

June, July & August 1944

By: William Garbo Sr

New Guinea is covered with thick vegetation known as "jungle rain forest" similar to the smaller islands of that general area of the South Pacific, notably New Britain, Guadalcanal and the Bismarck Archipelago. With an annual rainfall of 80 to 300 inches, (6' to 25') the jungle growth is massive within a few feet of the ocean leaving a narrow and steep sand beach. When first viewed from the ocean, you marvel at the beauty of this tropical paradise, the vegetation intermixed with coconut palms swaying in the breeze looks beautiful and inviting however after landing there this image changes. The jungle is characterized by giant hardwoods, which tower two hundred feet into the air with trunks six and eight feet in diameter, flared out at the base by great buttress roots. Among and beneath the trees thrive a fantastic tangle of vines, creepers, ferns and brush, impenetrable even to the eye for more than a few feet. Kunei grass 6 to 10 feet tall grows in a thick maze along the open sand bars of the rivers with its host of mites (carriers of scrub typhus), lice and giant spiders; the blades of grass are sharp enough to slice your arms and legs if you try to walk through without using a machete to cut an opening. Exotic birds inhabit the upper stories of the jungle growth while the Dodo bird walks the jungle floor and never flies because of useless wings, the result of an evolutionary change; its legs are powerful enough to kick a man to death when provoked; the insect world permeates the sluggish whole scene in extraordinary sizes and varieties: ants whose bite feels like a live cigarette against the flesh, improbable spiders, wasps three inches long, scorpions and centipedes that sting thrive in the undergrowth. Insects fill the evening air just before dark with a chorus of sounds so loud you can hear nothing else. When darkness falls the noise of the insects continues for awhile then stops abruptly as though ordered by some hidden authority bringing on an eerie silence.. The animal kingdom is less numerous, represented by species of large marsupial rats, a distant relative of the opossum, giant frogs, snakes and lizards ranging in length from three inches to three feet and a few much larger snakes of the constrictor type. Leeches fill the streams and must be removed from your legs after wading through any water and some varieties are peculiar in that they live in trees and drop upon the unwary passer-by from above sticking to the flesh, extracting blood in an instant. No air stirs here, and the hot humidity is beyond the imagination of anyone who has not experienced it. After a rain shower steam rises from every man's wet mud soaked clothing as though you are on fire.

Rot lies everywhere just under the exotic lushness and it's foul smell fills your nostrils. The ground is porous with decaying vegetation, emitting a sour, unpleasant odor. Substantial-looking trees, rotten to the core, are likely to topple over when leaned against, and great giants crash down unpredictably in every rainstorm. Freshly -killed flesh begins to decompose in a matter of a few hours with the aid of ever present maggots. Dampness, thick and heavy is everywhere the result of regular rains which give the forest its name; rain that is unbelievably torrential at times, never ceasing altogether for more than a few hours at a time. I was to find that most of the fighting in New Guinea took place near the coast or beach (not too far inland). New Guinea is one of the few places in the world that is mainly unexplored, there are no roads except short ones built hurriedly by the army engineers; foot paths, sometimes 8 to 10 feet wide used by the natives for thousands of years remain everywhere; they are hard packed dirt, dusty when dry becoming deep mud when walked on during and after a rain.)

Mosquitoes, bearers of dengue, and a dozen lesser known fevers, inhabit the broad, deep swamps which are drained inadequately by rivers.

The battle of the Driniumor river took place in the rain forest just described; a battle that, like the river will ebb and flow for 45 days of unbelievable HELL..

END OF BILL GARBO'S DESCRIPTION

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The stage for this battle shaped up a few months before it actually occurred. The Australian Army had advanced overland to the Sepik River in pursuit of the Japs, who were withdrawing to their major base at Wewak. The Japs had been deluded into thinking that our next assault would be on Wewak and had moved the major part of their forces, which included the 18th Army, in order to defend this base. On 22 April 1944 American troops bypassed Wewak and captured Hollandia, some 200 hundred miles farther west in order to establish a major supply base there. On the same date the Japanese base at Aitape was captured with its three Air Strips. One Air Strip was in fair condition and fighter planes would be able to use it within a couple of days. The other two were unfinished, as the Japs could not accomplish the tasks with the equipment they had. These were known as the Tadjji Air Strips and were located about eight miles east of Aitape. Since this was about halfway between Wewak and Hollandia it afforded Air support for the landings at Hollandia until Air Strips there became useable. Furthermore this screened the Hollandia base from the Japanese 18th Army

with it's estimated 50,000 to 75,000 men, which included possibly 25,000 first line combat troops. These daring operations, deep into once held enemy territory, were a success and effectively isolated all these Japanese troops at Wewak. The Navy and the Army Air Force were in control of the Sea and the Air thus blocking the Japs from receiving further supplies or reinforcements. The Japanese General decided that while he still had combat effective troops and some supplies, to attack the American troops deployed along the Driniumor River which was the outer defense of the Aitape base a few miles to the west. It would seem that his plan was to break through this line of our defense and destroy these troops. Then move on to the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) east of Aitape, destroying it as well as the Air Strips. Then on to Hollandia in hopes of joining up with other Jap forces and finding a means of acquiring supplies.



NEW GUINEA NATIVES & THEIR BOATS

The 124th Infantry Regiment, with supporting units, Artillery, Engineers, Etc., formed the 124th Regimental Combat Team which was ordered on short notice to ship out of Oro Bay to Aitape. None of the other Regiments of the 31st Division were in on this operation. The loading out was frantic but we got the job done and I remember being on a ship 4 July 1944, heading for Aitape. This is where the part about the Generals not knowing what was going on was demonstrated. The 124th had been ordered to go ashore east of the Driniumor in an effort to make contact with Jap 18th Army troops. Then the day before this was to take place the Japs launched a surprise attack, the night of 10-11 July 1944, against the Driniumor defense line, which was lightly

defended. The enemy had succeeded in moving two Divisions with Artillery into attack position without being detected. The attack came as a complete surprise to our Generals as well as everyone else. The defense line ran about five miles along the river from the ocean to the mountains. The Japs, as was their custom, did not attack the entire line but concentrated on a few hundred yards section with wave after wave of suicide charges. Despite heavy losses they continued these attacks and were successful against this section of the defense line. **Our troops had to withdraw as they ran out of ammunition.** The Japs had successfully completed the first part of their plan and had many soldiers "behind our lines" where they were capable of wreaking havoc among us. Including attacking our river line from the rear, plus supply lines, communications, Artillery and anything else they could find. With all these enemy troops "behind the lines" it behooved everyone to be extremely wary of any unusual activities one might encounter. They were back there with one purpose, to destroy anything that they came in contact with.



NEW GUINEA SOLDIERS - TRAINED BY AUSTRALIANS

The 124th was ordered into combat at this point in the battle, with the mission of reestablishing our defense line. In a few days the line was restored, however there remained a large number of Japs between the line

on the Driniumor and the MLR at the base. This group, which was “behind the lines,” continued to cause problems for us. At this time and in the extremely dense jungle it was most difficult to define “behind the lines.” It was easy for them to hide in the jungle during the day and cause trouble at night. Our troops had a very difficult mission in attempting to find and destroy them. However in a couple of weeks this situation had eased somewhat as many had been killed and others had infiltrated back to their own side of the river. In spite of all efforts and after two or three weeks there still remained an estimated 300 or 400 Japs" behind the lines”

In addition to the problems they caused between the river and the MLR, an ammunition dump, which was inside the MLR perimeter, was blown up. I recall explosions there for about two days before they finally subsided. I don't know if the Japs were responsible for this or not but given the situation it certainly seems a possibility. I never did learn for sure and don't know if anyone else did. It was also imperative that one be aware of Jap snipers as they used this type of warfare in unique ways..One such way was for them to climb a palm tree at night and with the use of a rope, tie himself up there. The guys on the line had to be especially careful in the early morning daylight, after emerging from their pillbox. It became almost routine for them to spray the trees around the area with rifle and machine gun fire in an attempt to get the sniper first. Of course a GI had no idea which tree or trees might contain a sniper. If one was killed the rope kept him from falling, so everyone had to continue to be wary.



NEW GUINEA NATIVES

In the meantime the formidable Jap forces continued their nightly suicide assaults on concentrated sections of the Driniumor River line. The most difficult thing for me to comprehend about the Japanese soldier was their suicide charges. **It seems to me that they were needlessly throwing their lives away, as two or three hundred would come screaming across the river. Our men in the pillboxes with their rifles and automatic weapons could hardly miss even with unaimed fire.** One night in particular stands out in my memory as they charged across the river at our third battalion. The illuminating mortar shell was used against these charges at various times and with great success. On this night our third battalion soldiers in their pillboxes waited until the Japs were almost across the river then our mortar shells illuminated the area. Now our guys opened fire and it's no wonder the river was choked with dead Jap bodies. This was not just an isolated incident either as it happened time and again. The three other Regiments on the Driniumor line experienced the same at various times in sections of their areas.



I BELIEVE THIS IS A JAP SOLDIER'S "DOG TAG"

At times during these nightly attacks the Japs would come in screaming a phrase which had evidently been taught to them by some of their comrades who spoke English. I heard of one time when they were screaming "to hell with Babe Ruth." I suppose their purpose was to make the American angry and he would come out of his pillbox and expose himself to their fire. Another ruse was to yell "Medic" or "help I'm Dying." Of course this was an attempt to get a Medical Corpsman to think that it was one of our soldiers in need of help and expose himself to their fire. I never heard of any of this stuff working to their advantage at any time. There were times when our Artillery was firing that they would come as close to our line as possible. This was an attempt to avoid the exploding shells as they knew our troops were suppose

to be a safe distance away from the area being shelled. At other times they would open up with their mortars in an attempt to make our soldiers think they were being shelled by their own Artillery.

It quickly became apparent that the Japanese soldier would rather die than surrender. I read somewhere that 100 Jap prisoners were taken in the Aitape campaign. If you figure 18,000 killed then 100 prisoners is not very many but I believe this number is too high. It would seem to me that someone just selected a nice round number. I am aware of instances where a single Jap might surrender with a grenade concealed on him and would attempt to kill himself as well as his captors. The instructions given us was to take a prisoner by having him strip naked and come in with his hands on his head. I believe the 124th took less than ten prisoners at Aitape but I don't know about the other Regiments. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that all three of them had less. The Japanese soldiers had been led to believe that if he died in battle that he would go straight to heaven. He had also been told that if he was captured the Americans would torture him. Of course this was not the case as he would be given food and any needed medical attention - thus living a life of ease compared to his life in the Jungle.



PERHAPS YOU MAY BE ABLE TO GET SOME IDEA OF THE

HARSHNESS OF THE JUNGLE FROM THIS PICTURE OF ME

After about three weeks of nightly Jap attacks along the Driniumor the situation eased somewhat. The 124th plus one battalion from the 169th was ordered to cross the River and go after the Japs that remained in the area. This group had the code name "Ted Force" after Col. **Edward Starr**, Commanding Officer of the 124th as well as C.O. of this endeavor. Much has been written about this "Ted Force" but I'll just touch on it briefly. These four battalions moved in different directions while eventually meeting at a given point. They had to move by use of a compass as maps were not of much use in the jungle. About all you could recognize was the ocean, the river, the mountains and perhaps a stream. It was very slow going, as they had to hack their way through the dense jungle growth with machetes.

This was an extremely difficult endeavor in enemy held territory which lasted from 31 July 1944 to 10 August 1944. It was difficult not only because of enemy soldiers but also from the rough marshy jungle terrain. Torrential rains came every day making footing almost impossible at times, with soldiers slipping and falling everywhere. Under such extreme conditions there was still an enemy out there fighting at every occasion that seemed to offer him an advantage.

Unfortunately this is war and we had casualties and being so deep in the jungle it's impossible to get them out at that time. Our litter cases had to be carried along and under these extreme conditions this was not an easy matter. Not having enough litters, some were improvised by using two saplings, with a poncho stretched between them. With such adverse conditions it was extremely tiring on men to carry litters. They would have to trade off and rest awhile which often made it a job for ten men to carry one litter case.

The dead were buried along the trail and when the battle situation permitted details were sent in to bring the bodies out. I often had to send trucks out for the purpose of hauling these bodies. Naturally the odor was unpleasant and the truck drivers hated this detail, even though all they had to do was drive the truck. In spite of such difficult conditions the mission was a success with the destruction of the Japs from the ocean to the mountains while others fled back toward their base at Wewak.



Bob Hope and Frances Langford came to New Guinea to entertain , there were others with them but I don't recall any names.

Along the Driniumor River was a totally different environment than these

soldiers were accustomed to and this took almost all of their energy just to exist. Yet in spite of this hostile environment, enemy soldiers, dense jungle, torrential rains, terrible heat of the day, cold wet nights, diseases and jungle rot, our foot soldiers prevailed. Being in transportation, I did not have to endure the trials of the foot soldier but the conditions made it a terrible experience for anyone who was there. As we think about our conditions and the 440 (87 from the 124th) American Soldiers killed in action in this battle; the conditions for the Japanese soldiers were much worse. With little food, hardly any medicine, plus a shortage of arms and ammunition and no hope of any more supplies. The 124th's first contact with the Japs along the Driniumor River found these soldiers in good physical condition with many being much larger in stature than the typical Japanese man. As time passed the shortage of food and medicine began to take its toll and their physical condition deteriorated rapidly. I have seen estimates that they suffered anywhere from 10,000 to 18,000 killed here at Aitape. Don't know if this includes those who died from disease and starvation but I suspect that it doesn't. I read in one publication that in all of New Guinea 148,000 Japanese soldiers perished in these jungles. It is my opinion that most of these died of starvation and disease. Many fell dead while attempting to move through the harsh jungle to some hopeless perception of a better condition for them in western New Guinea. In any event the end result of this battle along the Driniumor river here at Aitape was the destruction of the Japanese 18th Army as an effective fighting force.

As we began to prepare for the invasion of Morotai the 43rd Division relieved the troops on the line. Then a few weeks later Australian troops took over and sporadic fighting continued, with casualties on both sides, until the Japanese surrender at the War's end.



LOADING LST'S FOR THE ASSAULT ON MOROTAI

PASSING THOUGHTS

The defense line along the Driniumor River extended from the beach to the mountains, which was a distance of about five miles. The river was a twisting stream that could rise up very quickly when rain water came pouring down from the mountains but would subside very soon back to the normal flow of a shallow river. The river was of varying widths being about 200 yards wide in places and narrower in others. Heavy jungle growth ran right up to the river bed. At places there are a few islands scattered around in the river. With this jungle growth so heavy, it was a fact that enemies could be within a few yards of each other and neither being aware of the others presence. The mountains rise up very quickly to elevations of over 16,000 feet and are almost impassable. At times a few enemy soldiers would come around the mountain end of the defense line but it was such a struggle for them to do so that it was hardly worth their efforts. Then too the line was extended for a short distance at a right angle and parallel to the mountains, thus making it even more difficult for them. It just wasn't possible for them to move any large number of troops around the mountain end of the defense.

Being confined with our defense line to such a small area (beach to mountains) and in this very heavy jungle growth, a modern Army could not deploy a large number of troops and certainly no way to use tanks or heavy equipment. In addition to the 124th there were three other Regiments on the Driniumor River defense line. Each of these had at least one Battalion in

reserve; so at most at any one time we had eight battalions deployed.

This jungle war was quite different from any normal war as it had to be figured out as you went along; therefore much depended on small units such as squads, platoons and companies. In addition to the Jap soldier the enemy was the jungle, rain, heat, dark, diseases and cold wet nights. The American Soldier's friends were his rifle, ammunition, food, daylight and the Artillery but not necessarily in that order.

The Navy and Army Air Force had complete control of the ocean and skies for hundreds of miles around; thus keeping the Japs from receiving any appreciable amount of supplies or reinforcements. If a large group of the enemy could be spotted in the jungle then the Navy or Army Air Force could be used to attack them. Perhaps this may have happened a couple of times but highly unlikely as it was too easy for the Japs to hide in the jungle.



PAUL TILLERY IN NEW GUINEA

Supply to the guys on the defense line was extremely difficult as trucks could go only

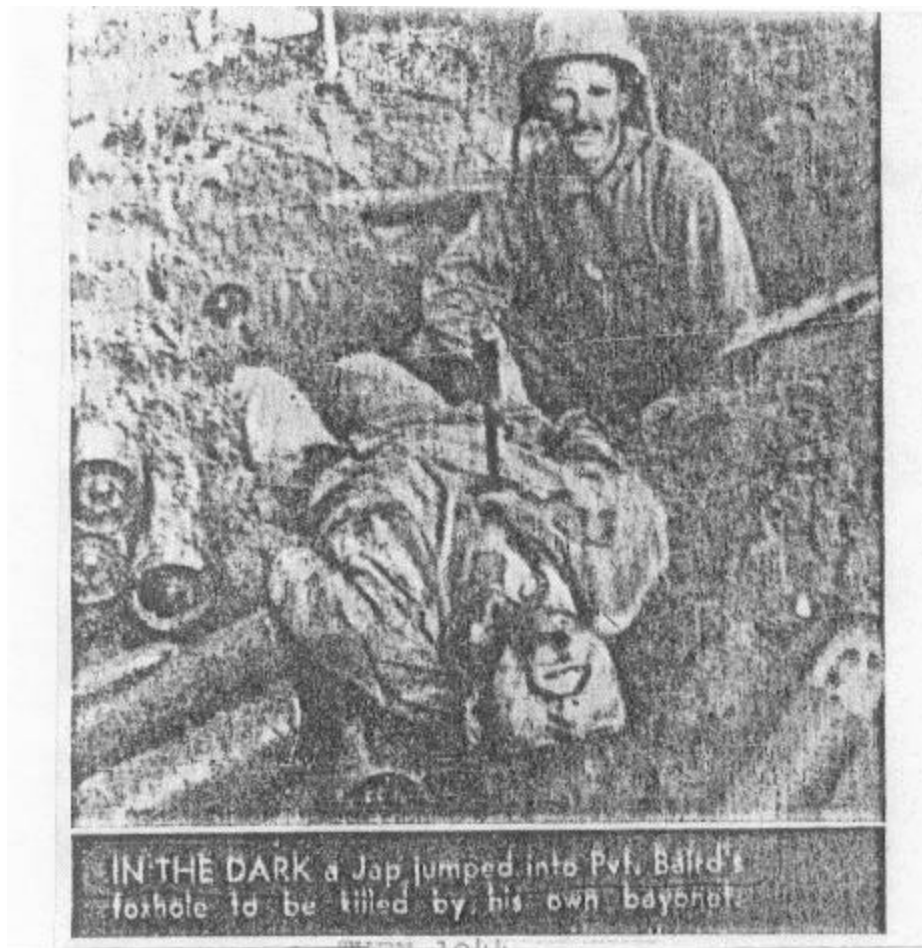
part of the way. Native trails were dangerous to use, as ambush was a distinct possibility. Landing craft were put to use moving supplies up along the beach near the river but at times these details had to fight off the Japs. At other times and farther inland the Riflemen were supplied by air drops, which became known as "Biscuit Bombers." The Soldiers on the ground would send up smoke signals designating a drop point for the guys in the planes. This became a problem at times as the enemy would also send up smoke signals which was confusing to the men making the drop. The result sometimes was that the Japs received some much needed supplies that were meant for our men. At other times they would wait in the jungle near a cleared drop point and fight with our soldiers over the supplies.

The Japanese were cunning in many ways in their efforts trying to trick our Soldiers. They would cut our telephone lines and set an ambush for the repair crew that came to repair it.

Of course these American Soldiers learned to run a new line rather than going out to fix the old one.

Our troops on the line would also try different things in an effort to outwit them in combat. One thing I heard about but can't verify whether true or not, but seems plausible, back-fired on the GI's who tried it. With the Japs attacking our defenses at night it was extremely difficult to know where he was out there in the jungle darkness. These Soldiers got the idea of stringing a wire in front of their pillboxes and attaching empty C-Rations cans, with rocks in them, to the wire. They reasoned that in the darkness a Jap would bump into the wire, rattling the cans and they would know about where he was. It seems the Japs found it, tied a rope to the wire and went back into the safety of the jungle. They proceeded to jerk the rope, rattling the tin cans with the rocks in them, all night and yelling, "you silly Yanks." But of course these GI's removed all of this stuff the next morning.

Besides the suicide charges the Japs at other times and for no apparent reason committed suicide. I recall one night when a Jap soldier climbed into the cab of one of our Service Company trucks and exploded a hand grenade. Pieces of him were scattered all over the cab. Some surface damage was done to the truck but not enough to put it out of operation. I suppose his thought was to destroy himself and one of our trucks at the same time. Of course he was only half right as he just destroyed only himself. The driver of the truck (**John Kohl**) from Pennsylvania) wasn't aware of the incident until that morning when he crawled out of his pillbox and went to his truck. He wasn't too pleased about it either, as it was his unpleasant task to clean up the mess.



ED BAIRD WITH DEAD JAP

Few Soldiers in the jungle can say for sure that they killed one of the enemy as most are hit by exploding Artillery shells or Mortar fire. A Machine-gunner and a Rifleman (whether an M-1 or BAR) were usually firing at a sound or movement in the dense jungle foliage. Most often at the same time and nearly always in the very dark night. **Ed Baird** from Texas, a buddy of mine who was also in Service Company, is certain that he killed one. The Japs almost always attacked at night and we remained in our pillbox or foxhole thus anyone outside was an enemy. On this night a Jap armed with a bayonet leaped into the hole with Ed who wrested the weapon away from the Jap & killed him. **The irony is that the Jap was killed with his own bayonet.** The 31st Division WWII book on page 38 contains a picture of Ed with the dead Jap. In 1989 Ed attended our Service Company reunion in Montgomery, Alabama and brought the bayonet with him.



ED BAIRD (AT THE LEFT) AND PAUL TILLERY, WHILE AT THE MONTGOMERY REUNION, TALK OVER OLD TIMES AND OF COURSE THE INCIDENT WITH THE JAP.

Gene Vann, a buddy of mine from Montgomery and also in Service Company, was the Warrant Officer in the transportation platoon and ran the Motor Pool repair shop. He tells me the story about **Louis Hecht** (2nd Battalion Supply Officer) looking for a Jap flag as a souvenir. It seems he came upon this Jap body and was searching it when an enemy sniper, hiding in a tree, took a shot at him. He's one lucky man as the bullet went through his shirt sleeve, leaving two nice holes on entry and exit, but not touching any part of him. Gene says the Jap sniper was killed, but not by him. I'm sure Louis Hecht was more careful about souvenir hunting thereafter.

Cecil Hughes, a buddy of mine from Birmingham and also in Service

Company, refreshes my memory about the time he was in charge of a detail consisting of about a dozen men to move a load of supplies on a landing craft and unload them on the beach near the river. The craft was fired on while they were still out on the ocean and they backed off. Then decided that perhaps these were just some stray bullets. Knowing too that they had to get these supplies unloaded they came on in.

While unloading they were attacked by some of the Japs who were “behind the lines.” Our guys found some holes for cover and began firing back. **One of our Service Company men, Neil Kartez from New York, was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his actions that day.** Kartez was a tailor by trade and his talents were continuously put to use by the Regimental Officers. He wasn’t the type of guy that one would expect bravery from, yet bravery is what we got. Many of the guys there that day told of him moving from one hole to another with a pistol hanging down between his legs. They tried to get him to stay put but to no avail as he moved from one hole to another bringing ammunition to our guys. His actions were deemed essential to this detail’s success. My recollection is that approximately 20 Japs were killed in that action and no one in Service Company took a hit. I recall the day that this happened and that the guys who went along were volunteers. I was planning on going with them but some duty came up that prevented me from leaving at that time. This all happened in broad daylight which was very unusual as most Jap attacks occurred early morning, late afternoon or at night. Service Company men were not supposed to be combat troops but even so we got into other fights along the beach and supply dumps. I guess someone forgot to tell the Japs not to shoot at us. It seems to me that all the shooting we Service Company Soldiers got into just proved that which we learned in Infantry basic training. **No matter what your military occupation may be, you are first and foremost and Infantryman and this applies to everyone in the Infantry.**



THIS SECTION OF OUR MOTOR POOL IS THE GASOLINE DUMP

Doctor **Tom Deas**, a Major from Louisiana, was Commanding Officer of the 124th Infantry Medical Detachment. The Doctors and Medical Corpsmen are held in high esteem by me and on a level with the Foot Soldiers. Major Deas writes about a Jap beach attack that occurred 17 July 1944.

Their target was an Ammunition Dump and Motor vehicles situated on the beach between the Driniumor River Defense Line just a few hundred yards east and the Artillery a few hundred yards to the west. There were men from Service Company, Anti-Tank Company and Cannon Company as well as the Medical Detachment who were and had been guarding this Dump and the Vehicles for the past three or four days. A Jap force estimated as one hundred men, waded out into the ocean, by-passing the River Defense Line, and attacked the Supply Dump and Vehicles. Besides Rifles they were armed with their "Knee Mortars" and 25 Caliber Machine Guns, known to us as "Woodpeckers." At one point in the ensuing battle, **Major Deas related that a Jap soldier had taken dead aim on him but one of his men (Buck Moore) killed the Jap** before he could fire his rifle. The end result of this action was that we had 4 or 5 Americans killed and 10 or 12 wounded with no one from Service Company taking a hit. Over 60 Japanese dead were counted and a number of uncounted enemy bodies washed out to Sea with the tide or were dragged away by their comrades. The 149th Field

Artillery, a part of the 124th Infantry Regimental Combat Team, was also attacked that same night. Their location was a few hundred yards west of the Dump area but I don't have any information on this action. I suspect the attack came from some of those Japs who were "behind the lines."

MOROTAI D-DAY 15 SEPTEMBER 1944



MOROTAI NATIVES

Moving ever closer to the Philippines and Japan, the Morotai amphibious landing brought us deep into enemy held territory. We loaded out on ships from Aitape while other units of the 31st Division loaded from elsewhere in New Guinea. A rendezvous at sea brought the entire Division together again for the assault on Morotai. Prior to D-Day, the Army Air Force had bombed nearby Halmahera rather heavily. This is a much larger island, which can be seen from Morotai on a clear day. Morotai was purposely not bombed, mapped or scouted, causing the Japs to assume that we had no interest in it. Furthermore, they were deluded into thinking we were after Halmahera and that's where they had concentrated their defensive efforts. These tactics resulted in practically no enemy resistance from air or ground forces on D-Day. This proved to

be a very good thing for us as the landing beaches caused many problems. **Landing Craft hung up on coral reefs causing soldiers and motor vehicles to be dumped into waist deep water or even deeper. General MacArthur** came ashore on D-Day and even he got his feet wet as well as the bottom of his trouser legs. Some Landing Craft had to wait for high tide to get off the coral reefs. Many motor vehicles had to be pulled ashore by bulldozers. In spite of all the obstacles our D-Day objectives were attained. Later on, better landing beaches were found on the other side of the peninsula landing sites. This made it much easier to bring in additional troops, equipment and supplies.

Our mission was to capture only a part of the island, set up a defense line and protect the base against enemy ground attacks. Other units came in to build the air strips from which Army Air Force planes would make bombing raids against the Philippines, Borneo and other targets. Our mission was accomplished against very little enemy ground opposition and minimal loss of lives. For the next several months enemy attacks on our defense line were at best sporadic. They just didn't have the manpower or equipment on the island to do more than harassing attacks. Their attempts to infiltrate troops and supplies from Halmahera were mostly failures as the Navy PT boats and PBV planes sank their barges. But let's not become too complacent, as we were, at that point in time, the most advanced position in once held enemy territory. Being in this vulnerable position, **the base was raided almost nightly by enemy bombers.** I read in a book published by the Army that between 15 September 1944 and 1 February 1945, there were 82 air raids against Morotai. From this information it's obvious that we were subjected to, in the neighborhood of 100 enemy air raids, as there were a few more after that date. Some of these enemy air raids caused very little damage while others destroyed many of our planes on the ground, as well as equipment and supplies.



A CAMP AREA ON MOROTAI

A particular incident stands out in my memory as one of the times I came close to being hit by enemy fire, which came about as a result of one of these raids. It happened a few days after D-Day while I was on special duty at the docks. This night while I was aboard a ship, which was anchored at the docks. An air raid alert sounded, which meant an enemy plane or planes were in the area. An alert calls for all lights out and to take cover for your personal protection. One of our planes was coming in for a landing and gave the recognition signal; thus the all clear was given. As a result everything was lit up again and we no longer needed to take cover. Unfortunately a Jap bomber, which no one was aware of, was following our plane in. Here was this enemy bomber in our midst with everything lit up for him. As I was standing by the rail on the ship, I noticed in the distance some unusual lights, not unlike flares, falling from the night sky. I learned later that the Jap bomber had dropped some phosphorus bombs. **Then without warning bullets were flying around me** and the rest of the ship, as well as the dock area below. I took cover for my protection up against the rail of the ship and was one of the lucky ones who didn't get hit. As I recall there were some Army medical people aboard the ship and one of them was hit by a fragment that came through a porthole. My memory is that as a result of this encounter 2 were killed and 15 or 20 wounded, on the ship and dock area down below. Of course it was later that I learned about the Jap bomber being there but during the action I had no idea what was going on.



MESS TENT ON MOROTAI

Our camp situation on Morotai was a good one including tents with cots. I even bought an air mattress from a sailor, which made that folding cot almost comfortable. By the side of each tent we constructed a pillbox by digging a pit large enough to accommodate six men quartered in each tent. This was covered with coconut logs and sand bags for our protection. A slit was left in order that rifles could be fired in the event of a ground attack. Enemy air raids were always at night. At the sound of an air raid alert we came out of the tents and sat on top of our pillboxes while watching the searchlights pick up enemy bombers and the Anti-Aircraft firing at them. Our fighter planes could intercept the enemy bombers before they arrived over the island or go after them when they left. While over the island our defense against them was left to the Anti-Aircraft guns and their bursting shells would hit any plane up there, whether friendly or enemy.

On Christmas Eve night 1944, one of our fighter planes remained on the tail

of a Jap bomber as he came over the island. Guys manning the Anti-Aircraft guns realized what was happening and discontinued their fire. Our searchlights kept the enemy bomber in view and we could clearly see the tracer bullets flying between the planes. We were all rooting for our pilot to, "Get Him," "Get Him," "Get Him," which he did. **The Jap bomber burst into flames and fell in the ocean** just off the island. A huge cheer went up from all the Infantrymen sitting on top of the pillboxes.

Moving forward to 2007 with this footnote - I supplied information on the above incident to Kristen Alexander in Australia who included it in a book she was writing. The following is an email that I received from her in 2007.

Author: Alexander, Kristen: Title: Clive Caldwell Air Ace I included your story of that Christmas Eve incident (your name is mentioned!), which occurred shortly after Caldwell and his wing arrived on Morotai. As I researched it a little more, I found that it was not Caldwell who shot the bomber down, it was flying officer Jack Pretty. Like you and your friends, Caldwell was yelling at him to shoot the aircraft, and it turned out to be Pretty's first and only claim for the war, rather than Caldwell's final claim. Regardless of who shot the aircraft down, it is a great story, and I included details of how you and your friends cheered as the aircraft crashed into the sea. I am really happy that you shared your experience with me, as it adds just that bit more to the event.



COMPANY HEADQUARTERS TENT



VEHICLE REPAIR SHOP

During enemy air raids we often had to take cover in our pillboxes to protect us from falling flack that came down from above as a result of exploding Anti-Aircraft shells fired at Jap bombers. All that metal had to fall to earth somewhere and if anyone was hit by it a serious wound could be the result. Then too, the pillbox afforded some protection from an enemy bomb that fell nearby. I mentioned **Gene Vann** previously and in talking with him recently I was reminded of an incident that in retrospect seems funny but let me hasten to assure you that at the time it happened it was anything but funny. As stated earlier we had a good camp situation here on Morotai, which was made even better when some of the men in Service Company brought in an electric generator. Where they acquired it, I never knew but of course it's often best if you don't know such things. A tank for fuel for the generator was placed several feet away and up on a small hill. This produced a gravity feed of fuel down the hill to the generator and the flow was controlled by a valve. Late one afternoon the

tank was filled with gasoline but unfortunately the valve failed. No one was aware of the valve failure and gasoline leaked all over the place and down the hill to the generator creating quite an opportunity for a fire. During the pitch dark hours of night, one of our cooks (I believe it was **William Prater** from Tennessee) went over to start the generator in order to have lights for the kitchen tent. When he hit the starter a spark set the gasoline on **fire creating huge flames leaping high into the air.**

Then things got even worse as **a Jap bomber came over about that time.** Their main target is usually the air strip but they were such rotten bombers that one might expect them to fall any where. Of course the air strip is nearby and I suppose he saw all the flames and figured, this is it, and dropped his bombs. I don't know how many bombs he dropped but **they were close as I could hear them whooshing through the air.** I do know that one fell very near on one side of the Company and another one on the other side but farther away. Of course during all of this we dive into our pillboxes for protection from whatever, as at that moment in time we had no idea as to what was going on.

I seem to recall some of the guys talking about one of the men diving into his pillbox head first and knocking himself out on a coconut log and they had to drag him on in. **Gene Vann** on entering his pillbox, rather hastily I might add, hit his hand on a coconut log. The next day he went on sick call and was sent on for x-rays which disclosed broken bones and this naturally called for a cast. Don't know how long he wore the cast but he still had it when we were on Mindanao. I guess if you break all the bones in your hand up above the knuckles, as Gene did, it takes quite a long time to heal.



PAUL TILLERY WITH "BUTTBUSTER"- THE JEEP WAS APTLY NAMED

It is now time for us to move on, as this operation on Morotai has been a huge success. Other American troops came in to take our place on the defense line. We then get ready to move out to sea again - destination Mindanao in the Philippines.

PASSING THOUGHTS

Our camp area on Morotai quickly acquired the name "**Nightmare Hill.**" I suppose this came about because enemy bombers seemed to guide off of it in their almost nightly raids that were mostly aimed at the air strip, a short distance from us. In another direction and a few hundred yards down the hill was the beach. Then opposite and a few hundred yards away was the defense line. There were instances of Jap soldiers infiltrating our lines and causing some problems but not very often. There were reports of them

stealing food from our kitchen tents and also rumors of them watching our movies. I think the part about them stealing food is correct but I'm not so sure about the movies. Besides the air strip, the Japs bombed the docks occasionally but with less damage. Our trucks were used mostly to haul supplies from the docks to supply dumps and to our units on the defense line, as well as in camp areas. Morotai is a very small island and we only took part of it, thus everything was nearby. Things we missed from the States were salads, fresh vegetables, ice cream and Coca-Cola. We did have Coca-Cola once that I remember.



PAUL TILLERY AND THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED SIGN IN THE SW

PACIFIC - A REMINDER OF HOME

With men from all walks of life in the Army it's not surprising that we had a **Moonshiner** among us. Some way - some how - **Pappy Drake**, one of our Service Company men, was able to get enough material to build a Still and run off whiskey. He kept his Still pretty well hidden and if we moved he moved his Still right along with us. I think he would get one of our truck drivers involved with him in the moving and keeping it hidden. I don't know how much money he made selling his product, known to us as "**Jungle Juice**", but business seemed to be pretty good. I feel certain the "Brass" knew about it but I suppose they considered it a "perk," or maybe they needed the supply
