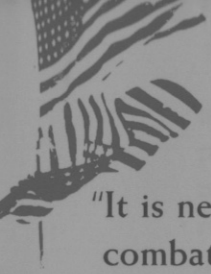


"It is never easy to get those who endured close combat—which is experienced by only a small percentage of warriors who are in eyeball range of the enemy—to talk about their personal experiences. They much prefer to talk about the bravery and sacrifices of their foxhole buddies or their leaders. With the passage now of more than fifty years and a realization that not much time remains to tell their stories, a number of the Iwo Jima combatants have been persuaded to discuss their experiences.

"These oral histories should be treasured because, God willing and if men of good will can gain the objective of peace on earth, these types of stories will never have to be repeated."

—from the foreword by
Lt. Gen. Lawrence F. Snowden, USMC (Ret.)
Captain, Commanding Officer, Fox Company,
2d Battalion, 23d Marines, 4th Marine Division
on landing on Iwo Jima, 19 February 1945

Jacket photos: Two 4th Division Marines help a third to an aid station (Arthur J. Kiley Jr.); *inset,* the second flag raising, 23 February 1945 (Robert R. Campbell photo from the Charles W. Lindberg collection).

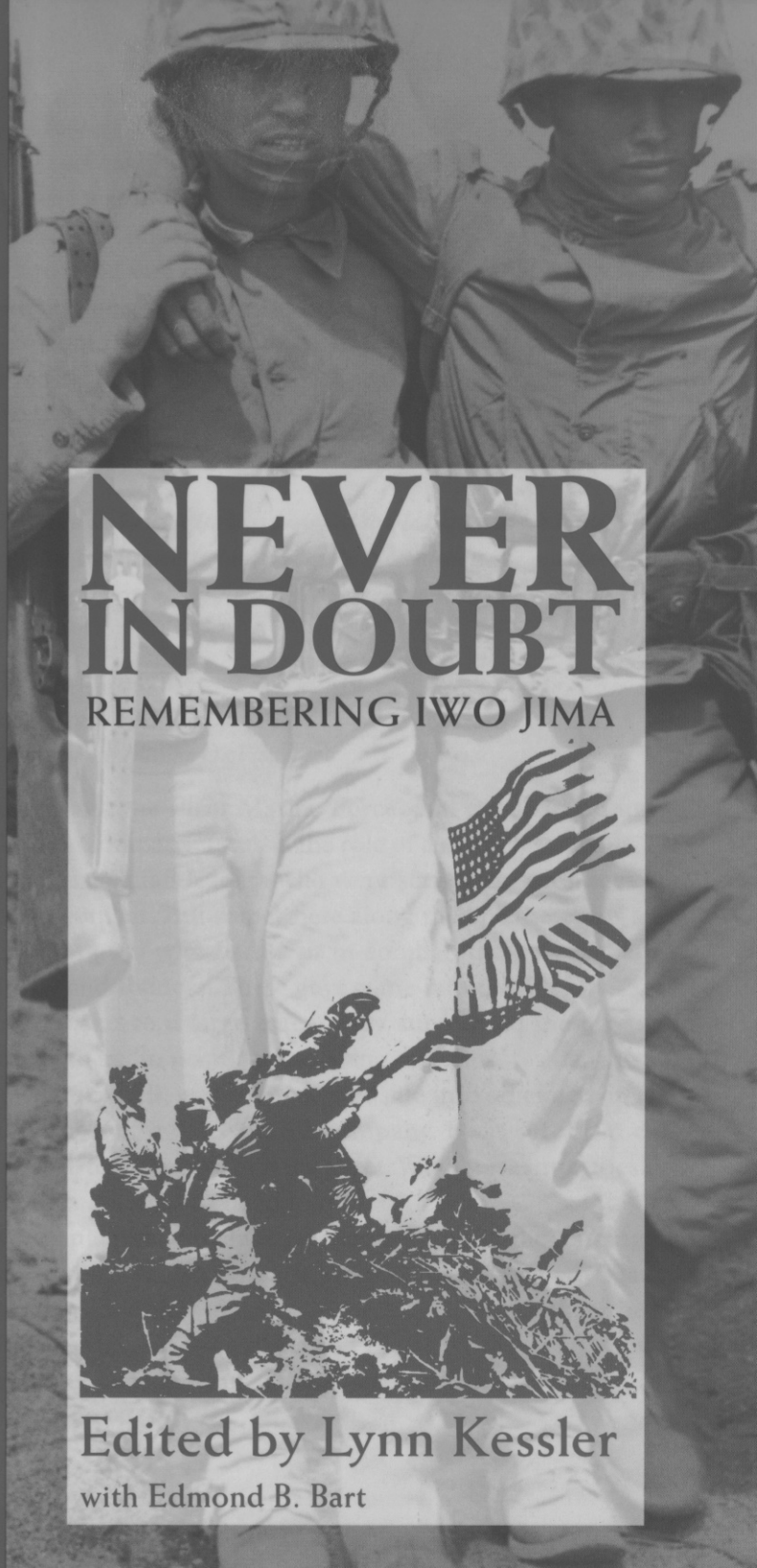
Printed in the U.S.A.
JACKET DESIGN BY CHIQUITA BABB

ISBN 1-55750-463-6
9 781557 504630 90000

Kessler

NEVER IN DOUBT

NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS



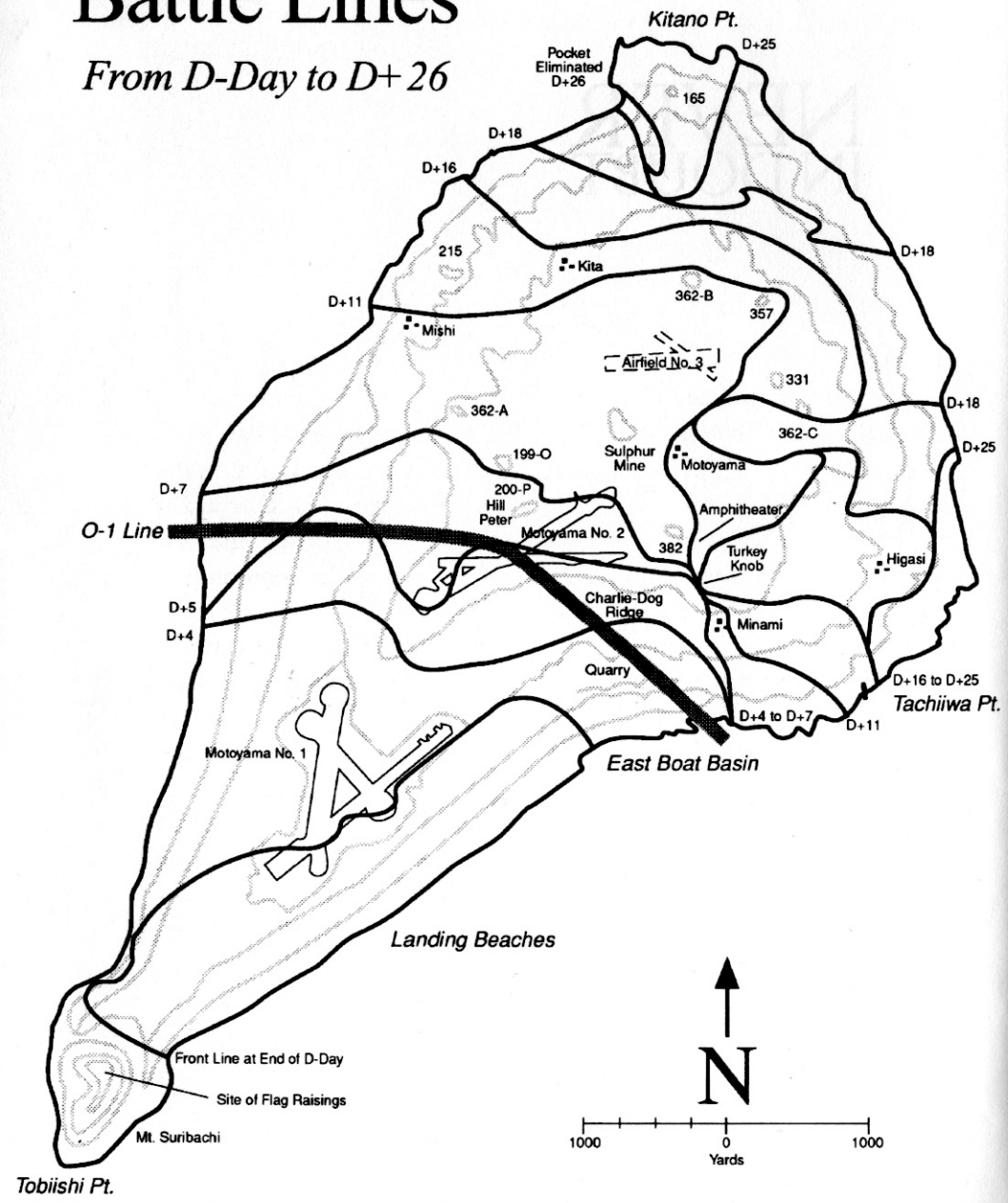
NEVER IN DOUBT

REMEMBERING IWO JIMA

Edited by Lynn Kessler
with Edmond B. Bart

Battle Lines

From D-Day to D+26



INTRODUCTION

There will be no detailed, day-by-day analysis of the battle for Iwo Jima here. That will be left to far superior books already in print. This book is intended to provide only an eyewitness report of personal events, impressions, and feelings about the battle for Iwo Jima, which imprinted itself sometimes indelibly, sometimes hazily, in the memories of these veterans. All of them were either enlisted or junior officers; their senior commanders are now long gone. Their oral narratives, as I recorded them, ran pretty much from the beginning of boot camp through the end of the battle, and on into the meaning that their experience has for them today. I have edited these stories for repetition and overlap, and I have corrected many inaccuracies with footnotes, but I have not always attempted to pursue absolute accuracy of facts, and therefore I will probably suffer the ire of the professional historian. So be it. The veterans told me their stories for the meaning these stories had for them, and for how their experiences have affected their lives since. They did not always have all the facts straight, but the meaning was always clear. Some were hesitant in telling the deep, visceral details of their experience, and I suspect this is because many of those details are still too painful to recall even today, more than fifty years after the end of the battle. Still, in my recording of these face-to-face interviews, some of these veterans broke into tears, yet none insisted that we not continue. Most insisted instead that they tell these stories not to glorify themselves, or glorify war, but to record the reality of the experience of the battle, partly because of their pride in participating, and mostly because they all want never to see a battle like Iwo Jima happen again.

almost completely blown apart, some were hit in the head. The hospital corpsmen would fix up whatever they could and gave them morphine or something. We even carried dead ones back and didn't realize it. I carried my best friend back, didn't know it was him. He had had a direct hit, from what I was told. With the flamethrower on his back, he got hit directly and it just burned him all to pieces. I didn't know it was him until the following day when somebody told me who it was.

When we did get some lull time I moved my headquarters up, because the 3d had gotten quite a bit ahead of me. They brought up most of my equipment and I dug in a certain area, and that was when I first took a bath. All we did was scoop out a hole and put your outer helmet in there with water and it would heat up because of the sulfur. And I tried to write. I also heard the flag raising. Didn't see it. The word went around that they were on Suribachi. I don't know where I was at the time, I was too busy doing my job to notice. We heard a lot of hollering and yelling and everybody was pointing. I got a vague picture of the flag, that's all I saw. The horns on the ships were all going off and we figured, maybe the war's over, you know, which was not the truth.

I was on the island until the sixteenth of March, maybe the twenty-first. There was a lot of mop-up going on at the time, they were going forward all the time. At that point, toward the end, a lot of my work was trying to recover weapons, rifles, bayonets, helmets. Machine guns, I think I saw only one that we were able to bring back. Most of them were smashed. I remember doing that, in the lull moments, going out with some fellows and picking up a lot of the equipment, and stacking it up down towards the beach. Some was in good shape. We left the Japanese gear alone. I didn't touch anything Japanese. We had been warned, you know, booby traps and all. A lot of guys did, but I wasn't about to touch nothing.

We had to wait until the ships came in and they started taking all the equipment off the beach. I was one of the last off because I had to stay with the equipment. I remember getting on the small boat and leaving and then praying that that boat was going to make it to the ship before they blew us out of the water. I think a lot of guys

felt the same way. They were still mopping up on the island, there were stray shots coming from different directions, you could see them landing in the water.

As far as I was concerned, Iwo was just another battle. The biggest thing to me was I was going home. They told us that when we left Iwo, as soon as we got back to our base, we were going to be on board ship to go home, within two days, and we were. And that was the greatest feeling of all, going on board with the other guys who were still there.

Platoon Sgt. Frank Juszli also was assigned to Headquarters, but his function was never quite as distinct as James Boyle's. Nonetheless, his interpretation of that function is typical of the fighting Marine's sense of duty on Iwo Jima.

Sgt. Frank L. Juszli

Platoon Sergeant, HQ Company G, 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division

When I went out the Fleet Marine Force, and got assigned immediately into G Company, I was in the role of a platoon sergeant. This role, and all the squad leaders who were sergeants, were guys who had not had combat. But somewhere along the line there was a hell of an influx of guys who had been in combat, the now-disbanded Paramarines and Raiders. These guys came into the 5th Division in big numbers, and to a large extent they supplanted the guys who were already there, in position, including me. This was hard to take because what the hell, we were pushed aside into other activities. In my case, I was a fifth wheel in the company. I was sort of in company headquarters, and I sat on my sheet. What were my duties? No specific duties. You had to bend to it.

We were up at three o'clock on the morning of the landing. We had steak and eggs for breakfast. It was nice, and everybody's laughing and joking about fattening us up for the kill and all that, the fatted calf, you know, bleating like a calf bleats, "baaaaaaa." We went down into the landing boats and circled, circled, and circled until

we went up to the line of departure, passing under the guns of the ships that were actively shooting, which was probably the loudest damned noise I've ever heard.

This is very dull, you know. Just cruising around in these landing craft. You can't see much, the island's too far away, and you need something to do. I don't know how I came by it, but I had picked up a book. James M. Cain's *Serenade*. We got to the line of departure, moving alone, and there I am, reading this book. There was a particular raunchy passage in there, and I just stopped and said, What in the hell am I doing, reading this raunchy passage, going into combat? I threw the book overboard.

Our 3d Battalion of the 27th was regimental reserve. The 1st and 2d were the assault battalions. They landed at nine o'clock, their H-hour. Our landing was at eleven-thirty, twelve o'clock, something like that. By the time we landed, we were playing catch-up. The assault units had gone out and made a hell of a lot of progress getting off the beach and into the middle of the island. By the time we came on, the beaches were being pretty well pummeled by enemy artillery. When we landed, our goal was to get off that beach as fast as we could, and do some clean-up work, where the guys in the assault battalions had bypassed some of the active stuff.

I took my first hit then. I was hit five times and never drew blood. You began to wish for the million-dollar wound, you know? I wasn't on that island more than an hour, and a huge damned piece of shrapnel skipped off the edge of the depression I was in and dropped on my chest. I was on my back in the hole, and I looked at that damned thing and grabbed it, which was the first of many mistakes, and burned my fingertips and threw it aside. Dumb Marine.

We got into the line right at the base of the first airfield. It was here that "Manila John" Basilone, our Congressional Medal guy, was killed.* And the word just swept through the 3d Battalion. He was

*In October 1942, at the Tenaru River on Guadalcanal, Sgt. John Basilone—who had served in the Philippines prior to the outbreak of the war, hence the nickname "Manila John"—single-handedly wiped out a company of Japanese who had attacked his cutoff position. He held out alone with one machine gun and a Colt .45 until relieved at dawn. On Iwo Jima, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone led a machine-gun platoon of the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, until mortally wounded by a mortar fragment on Red Beach 2.

just about where we were at that time, he was already killed. And he was a guy who didn't have come back. And this is where Louis Plain [Col. Louis Plain, XO, Regimental Headquarters, 27th Marines] got hit twice, in the same shoulder, and got evacuated. This is *first day* stuff, this left a hell of an impression on us.

Then we came under a mortar attack. On this airfield, just about everywhere you looked, the runway was built up, anywhere from two or three feet to thirty or forty feet, depending on the contours. I was on the edge, looking back, and it was our unit under attack. The Japs were using a square-tooth pattern, and I saw some of our own guys scrambling like hell. We hadn't dug in yet, and a couple of our guys got killed. Already, this day has been a very long day before we got dug in and squared away for the night.

A thing that became an important task for us was tying into the unit on our right. It just seems that the 3d Battalion was always the right-hand unit of the 5th Division, and we were tying into another division. At first it was the 4th, and very quickly after that the 3d Division got inserted. I was involved, in the early days, in that tying-in process, making sure the connections were there. We got tied in and settled down with the passwords and all, and at three o'clock the next morning the Japanese mustered an attack that was coming *right at us*. There was a hell of a call for illumination, which we got, and the naval gunfire really broke them up. There wasn't an awful lot of shooting on our part. These Japs, they were coming right down the runway, you know. That made the first twenty-four hours one hell of a twenty-four hours, there wasn't much rest.

Now, what the hell does a guy who's doing general duties in the company headquarters do during an actual attack? I reasoned that what the hell am I here for? My job was to get this thing over with, so I joined it, as a damned rifleman, in one of the line companies. Just hang out and shoot. No rank involved. We did a good job that day, went eight hundred yards, the full length of the airfield.

We did have tank support there, and this was a great feeling. I was close in with tanks around me, and pretty damned quickly mortars came in. But, you know, the mortars coming in, their job was not to destroy the tanks, but the protection to the tanks. Namely us. Immediately, what was the role here? Was the infantry protecting

the tank, or the tank protecting the infantry? We pretty soon learned that tanks are not a very good thing to have around you. They tend to draw fire.

These sorts of things were not without a lot of humor. Every company had a company clown. Ours was involved in this attack. For the most part, the attack was do your firing while the other guys are running forward, and now it's your turn to run forward with their support. Some of the guys got picked off while they were in the process of running. And you learned very quickly what a hit looked like, if a guy was in motion, the way he went down. You could tell if a guy was going down deliberately, or going down hit. Our company comic, who was advancing on one of the runs, he went down. It looked like he'd been hit. Oh, jeez, that would be a hell of a loss. But when things settled down, we could hear him yelling, "Get me the hell outta here!" He had stepped into a used latrine, the little familiar Japanese triangular post sign had fallen off. He was up to his arm-pits in it. We pulled him out, and what do you do? All the changes of clothes, all our packs, we had dropped them. We weren't even carrying out blankets, our ponchos, none of that. There was nothing available, no way to get cleaned up. But we managed to find a dead Japanese sailor, and our guy—he was a little guy, cotton-topped, pot-bellied—we dressed him up in a Japanese sailor suit. And put him downwind.

We sat there while another unit passed through us. Hill 362A was a prominence that had a ridge in front of it, and taking that ridge was going to be the important thing, and that's where G Company, 3d Battalion, 27th Marines got the hell kicked out of it. That's where Bill Walsh got his Medal of Honor.* And where just about all of the NCOs in G Company got taken out of action.

We sat at the southern of the two runways. I don't know why, but somehow we were told to spread across that open area, in two or

*Gunnery Sgt. William G. Walsh, 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, was attacking a ridge approaching Hill 362A with his platoon when it was hit with fire from three sides. Rather than retreat, Walsh and his men charged ahead to the cover of a shell hole at the crest, where Walsh smothered the blast of a Japanese grenade with his body. He died that day, 27 February, D+8.

three waves, to get over to the other side of this first turnaround area, where there was this undeveloped gap. So we sprinted. I can recall the process of sprinting, in waves. I recognized a dead Marine who had broken out his wallet and was looking at family pictures. He was one of the guys in G Company. I don't know how many other guys we lost, but there was a decision made that we weren't going to go sprinting across runways anymore.

So now, how in the hell do you get past the second runway? The decision was made to go around the end. Units had been involved in the attack in front of us, and these units had advanced and left behind their own foxholes. As I was going around the end of this thing, a 37mm gun opens up, and he hit a few yards out from the position I was coming in on, and this was a signal to get down. So I dove into a prebuilt hole, a good one. And within an instant his second round had hit right beside this hole, but I was already in it. There was a hell of an explosion, I could have reached out and grabbed the shell. It cascaded a lot of dirt in on me, and I got flipped over right as the next round came in on the other side. I got flipped over again. Both of these hit on the same side, and there must have been concussion in it because I was out cold. I had no idea how long. But then I finally came around and shook off the dirt, I was alone. The 3d Battalion had moved forward, and I was a casualty back there, pretty well buried. I got up with a hell of a ringing sound in my head.

But my decision there was to catch up with my unit. I knew the general direction to head in, so I just headed that way, going in the usual style, which was run, hit the deck, zig-zig, hit the deck. Play catch-up. What I was looking for was a familiar face. I knew the general direction of the unit, and all I had to do to confirm this was see somebody I knew. But I wasn't recognizing anybody. And somewhere over on the left, on a ridge, a machine gun opened up. He's opening up on me. I hit the deck, and thank God there was an almost immediate response from the guys to suppress this, because now I knew where the units were.

People up there must have thought I was nuts. Here I am, working my way through this group that is now static, and I'm the only guy going forward. But the only thing in my head was I'm looking

for a familiar face. I got on that damned ridge before 362A and made it just about right to the crest about the time it was getting dark, and our attack unit had just gone over the ridge when there was a lot of explosions happening, right up in front, from grenades, and for the second time that day I'm out cold. And through this whole thing, there's that ringing sound in my head, just overwhelming. I have no idea how long I was out. When I finally became aware again, I was in company headquarters. There was no shooting going on, everything was settled down. I suppose it happened from the practice that when a guy is out of it, confused, blank, whatever, you just tell him to report over to headquarters. No discussions, just point out headquarters, go report. That must be what happened to me. I got over there and it must have been a day or two before I was aware of what was going on. And from that point, I decided, no more am I going up to the lines. I'm sticking around the company, doing courier stuff. It came down to that. I was not going back to the line units, I'm gonna do whatever these headquarters guys tell me to do. I'm no longer unhappy to be out of the attack.

From there on out in the operation, it's just a series of isolated incidents. Like after 362, there was a swale where there was a Japanese unit that had held us up for a few days. A dozen filtered out and sat in a circle in front of us, and they're going through some mumbo-jumbo. May have been a prayer meeting, I don't know. We obliged them while they were out there, and we just opened up and cleaned them out. I was brought over as part of the company headquarters to observe the process. And I observed, but I didn't participate in wiping these guys out.

I remember a cook who had been pulled into the line. This cook was right beside me, and he got killed. Then I started to develop something of a pariah complex. Every place I go, something bad happens. Guys are getting knocked off all around me. What am I, a bad-luck omen? It really came to a head when we were in a lull, and I went back to battalion armor on the edge of the third airfield, looking for a familiar face. I found a guy, we chatted, had a cup of coffee, and I said, So long, and darted off. He was a perfect gentleman and

stood up, sort of bade me farewell and a single shot rang out from the runway. He's dead. The pariah complex was really mounting.

As time goes on, units are getting really confused, all mixed up. Where the hell is headquarters, headquarters of what? Very late in the campaign, the three battalions of the 27th Marines and one battalion of the 26th got merged into a composite battalion, under the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines commander. And even with so many replacements coming in, those four battalions came up to only one battalion strength. Seventy-five percent out. You look for a familiar face, and most of what you see are replacements. You wonder about that bad-luck omen. What am I doing left standing?

There was a defining incident that happened in a lull up by the third airfield. It was part of this pariah thing. There were three of us, in a secure area. We were not on attack. We had our rifles slung on our shoulders. And the three of us were walking together, just chatting, when a shot rings out from an escarpment in front of us, and the guy in the middle goes down. The third guy hits the deck and fires into this Jap who's in the process of surrendering, and I surprised the hell out of myself, because here was the defining element. I went down to help the wounded guy. Completely exposed, you know, to the next shot. But that was the definition, *right there,* of what are you going to do after this is all over? I'm helping this guy that's down. Not long ago one of our residents fell out here in the lobby, and I happened to be nearby. I got down with him. Hey, what can I do, pal? And that defining element set me up into the teaching game, education. That's where I spent my career. I had gone from completely selfish acts to completely unselfish ones in a single rifle shot. Absolutely.

But somehow I got back into the line again, being led into the gorge by a major who was not with our unit. I was corralled into this thing. And now the old standard came back to save the day again. Somebody got up close to me and said, Here, take this message back to headquarters. So I was called out of there. I have no idea how that all came about, but I must have been spotted by one of those familiar faces and told to get the hell out.

I went directly from there to load up on a truck, to go down to the beach, because the 27th was now being withdrawn from all activity. Would you believe the old pariah thing still maintained itself? I'm already in the back of the truck, and a guy with a flamethrower —how he lasted through the whole thing as a flamethrower operator I don't know—but he puts his flamethrower up on the deck of the truck, puts one foot up on the step and I'm giving him a hand, and a shot ricochets out of the gorge and hits him in the leg. What the hell? While I'm helping the guy up? The guy laid down and cried. Broken leg and all that business.

But that defining element has guided my life ever since. There's no question about it. Every time I see somebody go down, every time there's an accident, I'm on it. And that tells me something about my own nature. I'm not gonna step away from it. Somebody's in trouble, I'm gonna help out. I just do not turn my back on it and say, What the hell, it's his fault. I could walk away from it, it's none of my damned business. But no, I'm in there providing the relief. When there's a need there, I'll be on it. And despite warnings, people who say you shouldn't do that, you'll get sued, you dumb bastard, I simply say, Sorry, it's part of me. It's been defined as part of me way back on Iwo Jima. Even in a condition where the next shot could have been at me, I still did it, I still helped that guy who got shot. It's a hell of a way to get a definition.

9
MOTOR TRANSPORT

Motor Transport carried ashore the heavier pieces of equipment—generators, radar machinery, medical equipment, anything a single Marine found too heavy to manhandle—in large trucks called six-bys. Once ashore, and once unloaded, their duty became to bring as far forward as possible any of the lighter supplies that the line units needed—ammo, grenades, mortar shells, food. And like combat Marines, men of Motor Transport shared many of the same risks.

PFC Samuel Girasuolo

Motor Transport, 8th Field Depot, 5th Amphibious Corps

We left Hawaii on board a Coast Guard LST. We didn't want to sleep below with all the diesel fumes, so we slept on deck where they had some Army Air Force radar gear with us. And we found out, being on guard duty in the hold, that there was some beer on pallets, Schlitz beer, all strapped in. So I came back and told all the guys, Hey, there's beer here. And they said, Beer? I said, Yeah, but it's warm, and they said, Let's get some! So we went down and stole some cans, took them up on the top deck and that's all you could see, just beer foam, because you know how warm beer is. And we threw the cans overboard and I swear the Japs could have followed us all through the Pacific just by the trail of beer cans. But then they found out about the missing beer, and instead of putting PFCs and privates on guard duty, they put corporals and sergeants on it. Of course, they started stealing the beer, getting everybody drunk, and so they put on sergeants and staff sergeants and master sergeants. Finally, they just put lieutenants on it, and we couldn't steal too much after that.