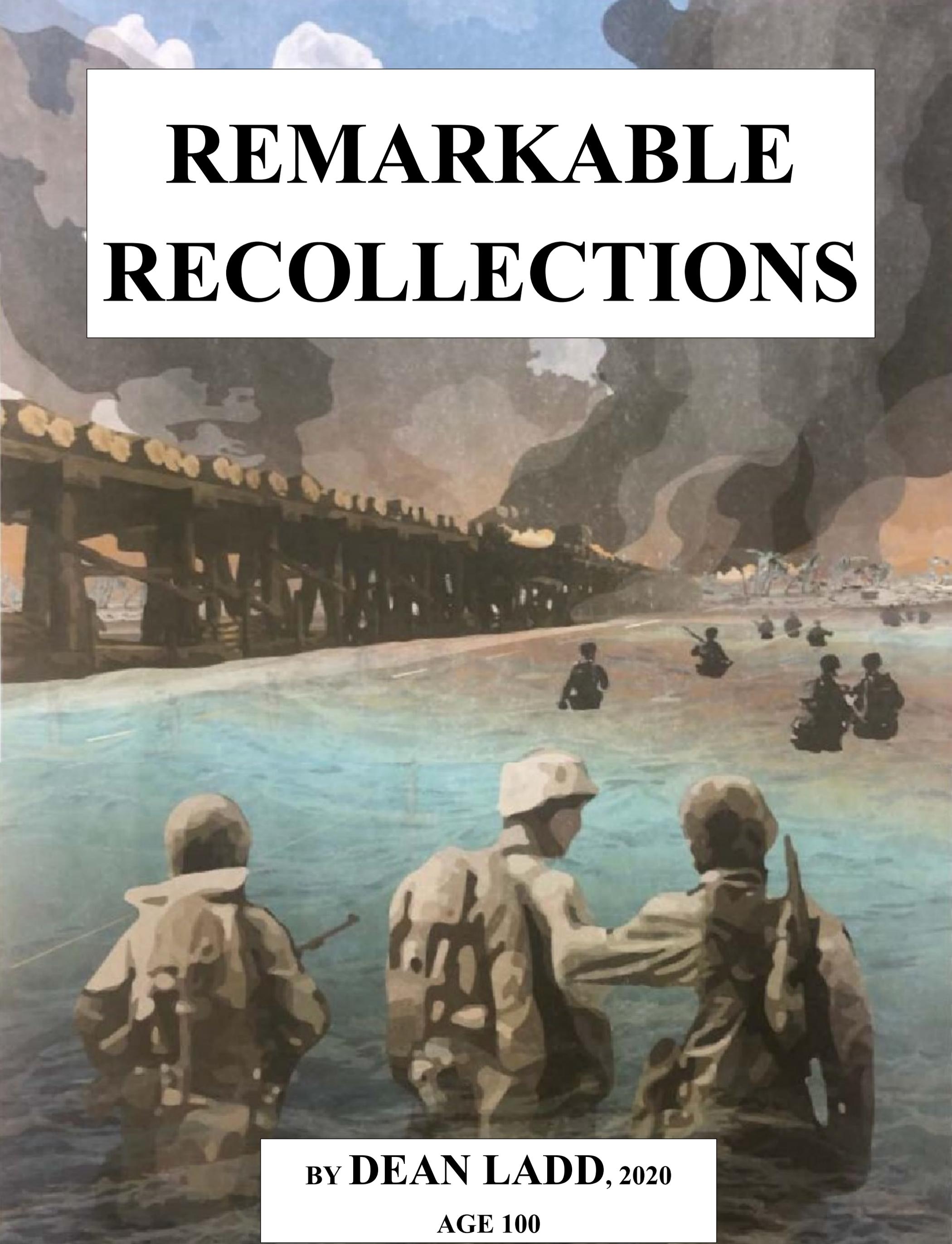


# REMARKABLE RECOLLECTIONS



BY **DEAN LADD**, 2020

AGE 100



"SKI" WILSKY

# **REMARKABLE RECOLLECTIONS**

## **Introduction**

The cover is a painting of my assault landing on Tarawa, showing me at the moment that I had been struck in the abdomen by an enemy machine gun bullet. Two of my men dragged me to another landing boat that rushed me and some other wounded to our troop transport. Thankfully, I had surgery within an hour.

I have often thanked God for repeatedly saving my life through a series of life threatening happenings. I have pondered His purpose in my life and sought His inspiration, while probing my lingering memory details. As I have since faced life's trials, I often compared them in perspective to my plight at Tarawa.

My experiences are described in greater detail in my two books "Faithful Warriors" (Self published and a rewrite with the same title through "The Naval Institute Press".)

The subject matter is organized in the following order after first describing my life threatening events.

**Guadalcanal campaign. August 13, 1942 to February 9, 1943.**

Events later recalled by date and occasion:

Personal affect items returned.

I met Tani at Guadalcanal reunion.

I interviewed Tani in Japan'

Correspondence for 15 years with him.

**Tarawa campaign. Nov 20, to Nov 22, 1943.**

Events later recalled.

Met Japanese and represented our nation at 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle on Nov 20, 1983.

**Saipan campaign. June15, to July 6,1944.**

Events later recalled.

Revisited sites and met many involved in WW II in 1982.

as a tour leader in 1983.

**Tinian campaign, July 24 to Aug 2,1944.**

Events later recalled.

I became C Company commander when Capt. Mel Seltzer was wounded. I faced a very trying time until the island was declared secure on August 2. I saw hundreds of Japanese kill themselves rather than surrender.

I later learned that Seltzer had committed suicide in the hospital at Guadalcanal because he knew he could no longer be a top professional dancer).

**Post WWII events.**

Grandson, Paul, was born on Nov 21, the anniversary of my being wounded on Tarawa.

Elected as president of the Lockheed National Mgt. Assoc. 1978 was under unexpected circumstances.

During WW II, I had eight life-threatening occurrences and many "ifs". Five were on Guadalcanal. The most serious one was at Tarawa on Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943, where I was shot in the abdomen. One was while I led my platoon against a strong Japanese position on a ridge above us. The man to my right was killed instantly, struck in the throat. The man to my left had a bullet strike his '03 rifle magazine, dropping the bullets out. Another time was as I glanced over a ridge a machine gun fired at me almost parting my hair. Nov. 1942, on Guadalcanal, a sniper nearly shot me in the face as I lay on the ground with my binoculars looking for him. While lying there, I spotted him just as a bullet struck the earth in front of me. In Jan. '43, as we were spearheading the last drive on Guadalcanal, a grenade dropped next to my legs. I tried to kick it away, but it struck a log and bounced back. Thankfully, it was a dud!

The next day, a bullet struck the earth between me and fellow officer, George Stein, who happened to be a fellow high school classmate. We were sitting in a foxhole looking down over enemy territory wondering, what next?

Our battalion commander, Lt.Col. MacCaffery, was a very calm man. When we were on the final drive he commented to us “to wake him if needed”. Unfortunately, he was later killed while leading a raider command assaulting Bouganville.

On July 2, 1944, at Saipan, three of our own 155mm artillery rounds were called in short onto our battalion position, causing 50 casualties. One round struck the top of a tree that I was kneeling under, which caused shrapnel to go in all directions. I could have been pulverized like many others but, miraculously, I received only a flesh wound in the right elbow.

On July 8, as I walked back to the aid station to get my wound dressed, I learned that I had walked through where 40 or more enemy had been hiding. They didn't shoot at me because they didn't want to give away their position. I later learned that they were killed the next night when they counterattacked.

Later Guadalcanal Campaign recollections—

In 1954, I was invited by a Japanese co-worker at North American Aviation, Justin Matsuda, to speak at his Buddhist Church. I participated in the ceremony in memory of the WW II fallen at Guadalcanal. Justin and I became friends, exchanging Christmas letters for many years. Justin even named one of his sons, Dean, who became a doctor when he grew up. The Buddhist Priest suggested that I return the personal effects I retrieved from WW II to Japan. A few weeks later Justin's wife, Janet, said she had a cousin playing baseball on the Japanese team for the world championship in the US. They had lost their first game and were sadly returning unsuccessful to Japan. Since I had the effects, we agreed to have the team take the face-saving opportunity to carry the personal effects with them back to Japan.

In route home, their plane stopped over in Honolulu where her cousin was the first to disembark with the dead soldiers personal belongings wrapped in a white box draped from his neck. Many Buddhist priests welcomed him and his companions. Word had reached Tokyo ahead of their arrival so when the plane landed they were met by a large crowd.

The Japanese newspapers emphasized the news about the personal effects that were sent from me to the families. The papers then carried continuing follow-ups about the impact of these effects on the soldiers' families and others. One of the belongings I returned was of a group of soldiers at a reunion. The photo had been taken in China, and not on Guadalcanal. The picture showed the men looking happy and that they were all alive!

Another happy event occurred when a diary that included a lock of a soldiers' wife's hair was returned to his wife. She was very thankful; because the custom was that the wife should serve his family rather than remarry. She had been concerned because she had remarried. What a delightful revelation because due to the returned diary, she saw that her husband wrote she could remarry. Upon reading that she knew she was free to remarry thus removing the obligation. Her dead husband's brother sent me a thank-you letter in calligraphy, saying how sad he was and yet thankful that he finally knew what had happened!

In 1982, Japanese WW II veteran, Major Akio Tani and I met by chance at the Hibiscus Hotel on Guadalcanal. The hotel is located near where I had shot the sniper in Nov. 1942, who had nearly killed me.

Tani and I were both staying at that hotel for about five days attending the reunion of “Guadalcanal Campaign Veterans”. Until we met, his presence had been unknown to everyone, but I discovered that he was staying in a nearby room by chance.

We had referred to Tani as “Pistol Pete” during combat because he was one of those who had fired artillery at us for several months. He had fired several thousand rounds at us during a six-week period, until the guns became inoperable toward the end of November. His problem was that there was no more spare packing for the gun recoil mechanism.

He told me that this was his third visit and that I was the only WWII vet that he had met. The main purpose of his trips was to collect bones for ceremonial burial. He studied an enlargement of another photo of another gun of his and pointed out He went on to express a sentimental feeling for his guns as if they were old friends. His last firing of his guns had coincided with a renewed Japanese offensive.

He showed me the location of his guns during combat, which included one positioned near the shoreline. (Fig. 2). While walking to that site, we passed some native boys and he remarked that he would bring them some candy the next time they met!

Fig. 3 shows us at one of his guns at Vilu Museum, located about 12 miles to the rear of wartime position. A sign in the distance beyond the gun read, “Officer’s Country, Out of Bounds” We later drove by the Bonega River where a Japanese suicide battalion had fought a rear-guard action, as about 11,000 were being withdrawn from Guadalcanal. I later met famous Sir Jacob Voussa (Fig. 4).

Tani, unfortunately, had to return home before many of the US veterans had arrived. We studied his detailed map and discussed our many experiences. We continued to refer to it during the following 15 years of correspondence. He also continued to make sketches, detailing different events. He also drew portraits for our occupation forces.

We became close friends and even considered a possible revisit together to his OP position (Fig. 5) and sharing a night there! Unfortunately, he died with stomach cancer before that could happen.

During the interview with Tani at his home in Japan in 1985, I also met Cpl. Ohno, his runner on Guadalcanal. Ohno was then a marketing executive for “Cannon”. Ohno had been wounded by our counter-fire and their colonel expected him to dig a foxhole for him even though he had been wounded. Both Ohno and Tani shared the same dislike of their colonel. Tani referred to him as typical of “the upper crust”. He also felt this way about many other ranking officers as being more interested in getting decorations and promotions rather than the welfare of their troops. He said the present generation doesn’t want to hear the “truth, only fiction!” He felt that it was too late to get out the correct information because memories are fading. Later, while the colonel was approaching Bougainville his ship was sunk. After the war, Ohno revisited the gun position and found the colonel’s boots and gave them to his widow.

Tani’s father was a Maj. General and professor at the Military Staff College. Two of his students came to his home before WW II for additional study. One was from the Emperor’s family, who later became Gen. Kaya. The other was Lt. Gen. Miyaz, who was one of the Japanese officers representing Japan on the battleship Missouri.

Other Japanese vets joined us for the 1985 interview. I erred in commenting about a detail of his writing that misstated something about use of our mortars. I sensed the questioning expressions from his friends and realized their culture could have lost face.

He drove me around Tokyo to such places as the very important Yasakuni Shrine, where the souls of their war heroes reside and displayed such items as a suicide submarine and aircraft. Other places visited were the imperial palace, a TV studio, and areas of fire bombing destruction.

Tani prepared a map showing all his information on Japanese locations. We used this map extensively in the interview with Tani referring to locations of Japanese forces about what and where the action happened. He even drew some sketches about these. He had drawn sketches for the American forces that were stationed there afterward.

Tarawa Campaign, November 20 to 23, 1943.

On November 21, 1943, while I was leading my platoon in the assault landing on Tarawa Atoll, I received a normally fatal bullet wound through my bladder that exited through my sacrum, narrowly missing my spinal cord.

Remarkably, I was operated on about an hour later aboard the Sheridan troop transport ship by Lt. Com. Dr. Lloyd Sussex who had previously been an abdominal specialist at the "Mayo Clinic". I was later referred to as his "miracle patient". I was presumably dying of shock so they could only eliminate pain with a spinal injection, so I was aware of the entire  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour operation. He had to sew up my bladder and reconnect damaged intestines. Surprisingly, I did not even have to wear a colostomy bag afterward! That surgery left a six inch long scar that I later compared to one on my dad's back where he had surgery to remove fluid from his lungs due to pneumonia during WWI.

When I was admitted to the hospital at Pearl Harbor, I was considered worse than 90% of the cases but I was released from the hospital two months later in a weakened condition. Many nurses disagreed with the hospital policy of releasing the wounded as sick as me to active duty so soon. They had to though, because of a shortage of company grade officers. One of the nurses who questioned the early hospital release was Iva Chizek. She has visited me twice many years later. The first time was at Scotts Valley, CA, when coincidentally my Russian guest, Joseph Ioffa, a former Soviet Political Commissar on a speaking tour, had to go to the emergency room with an asthma attack.

The second time was shortly later in 1990, after we had moved to Spokane, WA. Two unlikely events at that time were that Iva was able to suggest to my daughter, Lia, a practical way to take care of her one month old granddaughter, Debbie's' herniated umbilical cord. She was also present shortly after that when my mother passed away.

When I rejoined my unit, with limited duty, at Camp Tarawa on the Big Island, I told Dr. Sussex about remarks by his young surgery assistant doctor that I "could later face problems with intestine adhesions and would probably die young". Dr. Sussex responded that "a doctor shouldn't make that kind of remark and that it wasn't true anyway"!

Sussex was transferred back to the States about a year after my surgery and unfortunately dropped dead of a fatal heart attack at the young age of about 55, while he was operating on a patient at Farragut Naval Training Station.

Details about my wounding are as follows:

As I jumped off the landing boat ramp, I walked a few more steps and heard cries of wounded men yelling for Corpsmen. I was worried about stepping into shell holes. Fortunately, the water depth along my route of advance continued to be only about waist deep. Then as I continued about 100 yards further, I helplessly watched gun bullets traversing back and forth, striking among us. It was a curtain of death!

It was now clear we were in desperate straits but we were committed. We had no other option than to keep wading. I soon found myself at the mercy of the grim reaper. A sickening splat, like

an inner tube snapped across my abdomen. I realized a bullet had struck me nearly dead center near my navel. I quickly removed my pack, small radio, carbine, helmet, and web belt. I was too weak to maintain my balance—forgetting about everything but trying to keep my head above water.

My thoughts turned to my parents and how they would take the news of my death because I thought my wound was mortal. Machine gun bullets continued all around me, churning up the water. Pfc Thomas F. Sullivan, came to my rescue.

“Lieutenant, where are you hit?” he asked. His first concern was to keep my head above water while checking the seriousness of my wound.

Pfc John Duffy, also stopped to help give me first aid. He nervously opened my first aid pouch and tried to empty the contents of sulfanilamide powder onto my wound, not realizing that the wound was below the surface of the water and that the powder was just floating away!

Sullivan asked me, “Should I take you to the beach or back out to that landing boat?” I weakly answered, “That boat.” I would get quicker medical help that way. As he dragged me toward the boat, the hailstorm of bullets continued. It didn’t seem possible that we weren’t being hit. I was concerned when he momentarily stopped and I asked him if he was OK. He replied, “Just resting”. Years later I realized that boat was controlled by Coxswain Larry Wade, which Lt jg Eddie Albert had directed to help pick up the wounded at the reef. Eddie Albert was in charge of all landing boat recovery from our troop transport, the “Sheridan”.

Other wounded were also being dragged to that boat. The coxswain, Larry Wade, kept the boat ramp partially up for protection from machine gun fire, so the wounded had to be lifted high over the ramp.

Upon reaching that boat, they struggled to push me up and over the ramp because I was too weak to help. There was a husky man with a massive eye wound who helped pulled me up and over the ramp. This man had been pushed aboard just before me and extended his burly arm to pull me up with the last of his strength. Pfc Dean Snyder was pulled up next. I recently saw a photo of him on the internet.

As I slid down the ramp, my situation awareness shifted beyond my own condition to the plight of about ten other wounded, writhing in pain on the deck. After the others were pushed aboard, we had a rough ride over choppy waves outside the lagoon back to the transport. I remember lying on my back at the bottom of the boat, bouncing up and down experiencing intense abdominal pain. The trip lasted about 15 minutes, but it seemed longer. I recall thinking, at least, if I die, it will not be on the beach but instead at sea.

I later discovered Duffy’s grave on Tarawa in 2014. Sullivan survived the war, but I could not locate him. They both had ignored standard assault landing orders to not stop to help wounded because many more lives could be lost. That was why I told them to leave me. I have recalled how Sullivan was prone to being independent.

I arrived back at the Sheridan troop transport that I had disembarked from the day before. The wounded were lifted aboard the transport from landing boats by means of a double-basket stretcher raised by ship’s davit. I shared the first one with the same Marine with an eye wound and encouraged him that we’ll make it now-- to which he responded, “You’ll make it”. I later learned that he died shortly afterward.

They took me immediately to the ship’s operating room where I was to be operated on. The surgical team consisted of three doctors. One was a former abdominal specialist at the Mayo Clinic, Lt Cdr Lloyd Sussex. How fortunate for me! Dr. Sussex later told me that I could not have survived another two hours because of the poisons getting into my system. Toward the end of the

delicate operation to patch up my bladder and remove a length of large intestine, the doctors became concerned that my constitution could not withstand the shock starting to set in. I felt very weak, as if I were going to fall asleep.

The next night I was delirious and constantly attempted to throw off my blanket. Since I was now in shock, it was important that they keep a heat tent over my body. A pharmacist's mate watched me all night.

The next day I was very uncomfortable because of the various tubes extending into my body. They were for intravenous feeding, and drainage from my bladder. While I was in this condition, Eddie Albert (then Lt JG E.A. Heimberger) visited me and other wounded.

Eddie Albert, who was a movie star, told me at a breakfast meeting during a reunion in Long Beach, CA, that his ship's captain had displayed anti-Semitism because Eddie's born name was Heimberger. But Eddie's Christian faith became real on Tarawa. He also told about sharing a foxhole with Lt Col. Evans Carlson the night after I was wounded.

See Fig. 9 photo of me with Eddie Albert and Larry Wade, who helped to pick up the wounded, and Dean Snyder and me.

Saipan Campaign June 15 to July 6, 1942.

During my revisit to Saipan in 1982, I discovered my combat path had intersected Captain Saikai Oba's path right after the Bonsai. He was well known in Gamagori, population of about 80,000. He had served in City government and he was a realtor. His home was approached through an alley and had beautiful landscaping. He had revisited Saipan three times would like to go again but was now limited by a heart condition. His wife drove us to the train station.

See the photo, fig. 5, of him surrendering his sword, which caused him to be denied promotion to Major, even though Japan had already surrendered.

Oba and his wife at Orlando. Fla. attended 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Div. reunion  
Maines honor guard for FDR

Tinian campaign, July to August 2, 1944.

I took command of C Company when Capt. Mel Seltzer was wounded (later losing a leg) and my battalion commander, Lt Col Hayes, emphasized the importance of our capturing the imposing high ridge facing us before darkness, to prevent the enemy from counter attacking from it. Fortunately, A company on our left flank captured that ridge by way of an unopposed winding road—how fortunate!

The following day we moved rapidly through a cane field to the final cliff, overlooking the ocean. The island was declared secure that same date on Aug. 2.

My radioman had been killed during the enemy counterattack on the ridge that we had just captured. He shared a foxhole with me and had responded to a call for help, installing wire for our 81 mm mortars. The radioman with George Stein, next to my foxhole, was also killed.

It was a very insecure night on that ridge with the enemy all around us. One of our anti-tank gun positions was about 30 yards from my foxhole and our gun crew was killed.

I also had a scary time the next day, when we were advancing across a cane field toward our final objective, a cliff overlooking the island southern shoreline. I heard an enemy machine gun fire toward me from an unknown location.

I had been momentarily separated from my platoon leaders, since my radio man had been killed the previous night. I thought to myself that I don't want to lose my life now that this campaign is nearly over!

When we reached the cliff overlooking the shoreline far below, we saw hundreds jump to their deaths rather than surrender. That night, the remaining Japanese attempted to get through our holding line which was much longer than we could cover. We, fortunately, determined where most would most likely attempt to come through and killed them.

In early January 1945, I was at a Beverly Hills night club with my date, Louise Ross, and a Marine officer who had just returned from Saipan. He was with his mother. I had met Louise, a receptionist at the William Morse Agency. That agency was hosting the Christmas party for many famous movie actors who she enjoyed pointing out to me.

A surprise was that her family was close friends with the Seltzers in New York City where she and her family played bridge together. I asked the Marine, at my table, about my previous captain, Mel Seltzer, and he revealed that he had committed suicide in the hospital because he had been a professional dancer and didn't want to live. Louise already knew about his demise.

I recently confirmed details of Seltzer's pre WW II professional dancing career that I found on the internet along with such dancers as Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers and others that he was associated with but had never revealed to me.

In Sept. 1945, I had left my cap in the movie theater at Quantico and went back for it. I asked a woman Marine who was closing the place if she had seen it. I gave her my name and said my name was in the hat. Surprisingly, she told me that Ladd was also her name and that her father was a Marine Colonel in the UK as Military Liaison.

The next surprising situation about Seltzer also involved Brady Nelson. He had recently informed me that his grandfather was in the same unit I was in and that his father had been named after Seltzer!

While reading a book by Capt. Roy Elrod, titled "We Were Going to Win or Die There", I found that Seltzer was also his best friend, (See Fig.13) and that Elrod had been hit by the same artillery on Saipan as me, which forced his medical retirement.

After Seltzer had his leg mangled on Tinian, I took over as company commander.

The following misc. post-WW II remarkable events are recalled:

December 8, 1941 was the date the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. This was the same date I was born December 08, but, in 1920. That same year women were able to start voting also.

A few months after I was released from active duty I went skiing on Mt. Spokane and stayed overnight with some friends, including a girlfriend named Mary. Surprisingly a previous girlfriend with the same name also showed up! Everyone then made fun of that by singing, "Mary, Mary, that's a grand old name".

I met my wife, Vera, at a wedding where she sang along while my brother, George, played the piano. I was the best man. We discovered that we had been in the same H/S graduating class. That meeting resulted in our getting married two weeks later and off to Ohio because of a job transfer.

My grandson, Paul, was born on Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>, which was the anniversary date of when I was wounded on Tarawa. We moved to Spokane from Scotts Valley, CA. on Friday the 13th, Nov. 1989, a few days before a 7.1 magnitude earthquake happened in the Loma Prieta.

My study of genealogy revealed that my ancestry goes into royalty and that I share a common ancestor with Queen Elizabeth, going back about 19 generations to King Edward the 1st, known as Long shanks.

I will end this manuscript by recalling an unexpected situation shortly before my retirement from Lockheed in 1979. I had also previously retired in 1969 with 30 years active and reserve service in the Marine Corps.

I was elected president of the 3,000 member Lockheed National Management Association (LMSC Chapter). The current president surprised all by marrying the company CEO while I was Vice President. I was then elected and became President for one and a half years. The election process brought out opposition to my Christian-based stand of starting with a prayer at the monthly Executive Board meetings. I applied the following Bible applications:

“I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.” Phil. 4:13

“Let your life shine before men and glorify your Father.” Mt 5:16

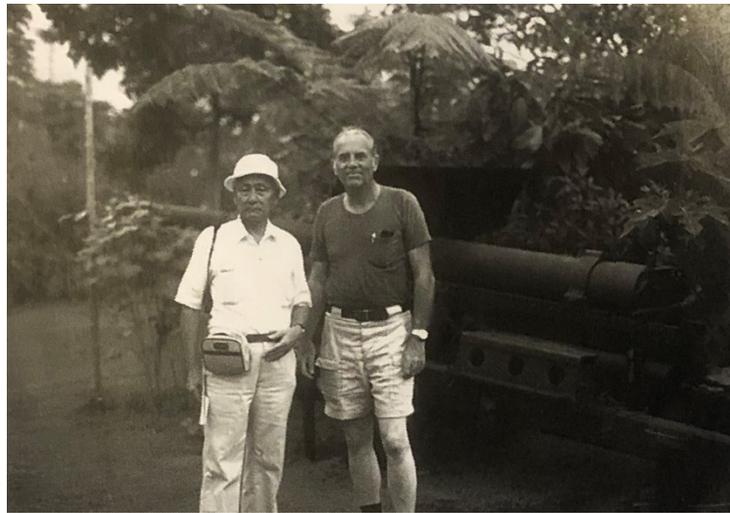


**Fig 1. Text in Intro. Tarawa Landing. Official USMC by Tom Lovell**





**Fig 4. Interview with Tani at his home near Tokyo in 1985.**



**Fig 2. Author with Capt. Acio Tani at one of his 105 mm guns at Guadalcanal in 1982.**



**Fig 3. Tani at his OP foxhole on Guadalcanal in 1982.**



**Fig 5. Interview with Capt. Sakai Oba. at his home in Gamagori, Japan**



**Fig 6. Oba surrendered his sword but was denied promotion to major even though Japan had surrendered.**

# 50 Years-Together Again



Dean Ladd  
*Dean Ladd*

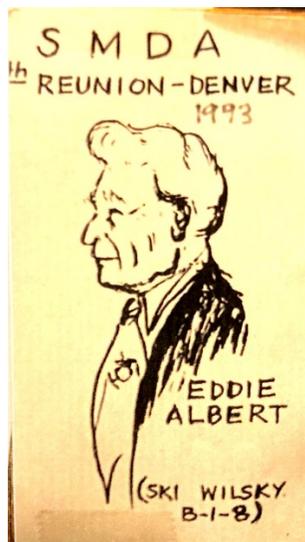
Dean Snyder  
*Dean Snyder*

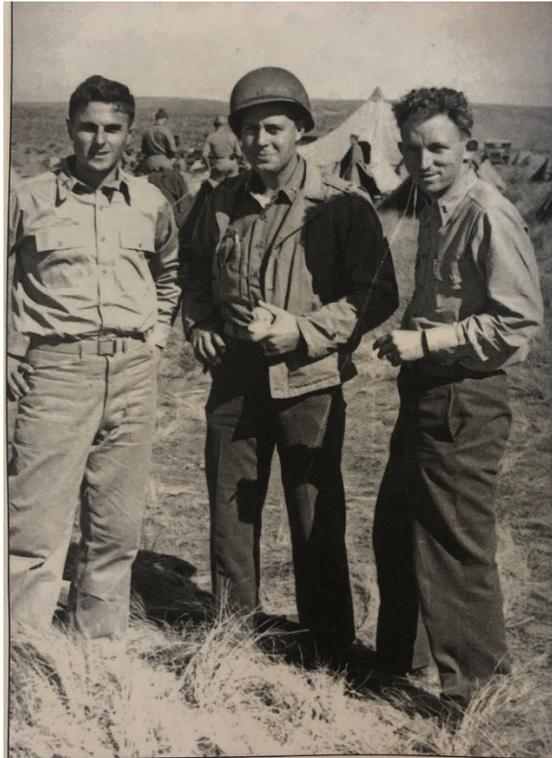
Eddie Albert

Larry Wade  
*Larry W. Wade*

George Thomas  
*George Thomas*

Fig 7. Reunion of author with Eddie Albert, boat coxswain, Larry Wade, and another wounded, Dean Snyder, in 1988 at Long Beach, Calif.





*Elrod (center) with friends Melvin Seltzer (left) and unidentified Marine officer (right) at Wairoo, New Zealand.*

**Fig 8. My Captain, Melvin Seltzer on left with close friend, Captain Roy Elrod center, before the Saipan campaign in 1944. Elrod was wounded by our same incoming artillery as the author on Saipan and was medically retired.**

**I became Company Commander after Seltzer was wounded on Tinian and he later took his own life, because he could not continue as a prominent professional dancer.**



**Japanese killed on Saipan in the war's largest banzai attack are buried in mass grave by the U.S. Marine Corps**



**DEATH BY SHELLFIRE** came to Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner (*right*) a few minutes after he entered this Eighth Marine observation post on Okinawa, to watch Marines attack in the valley below. Colonel Clarence R. Wallace, (*center*) CT8 commander, and Major William Chamberlin (*left*) were unhurt.

