

April 16th entry to Howard Memoirs

In an earlier entry my experiences in WW II, I recall ending with our landing on Okinawa as replacements in the 96th Infantry division, who by now had lost half their men to a fanatical Japanese combat force, who were well trained and equipped and skilled.

Armored trucks met us as we emerged from the LSTs which brought us to shore, and they then brought us to the front lines, now about halfway down the island, but still a bit more to go in order to clear the island of Japanese forces. The positions that we took up consisted of a line of empty foxholes, once occupied by now dead or wounded 96th infantrymen. The foxholes lined a ridge of a small cliff facing a tract of grassland to the base of Oboe Hill. Beyond Oboe Hill lay a vast prairie over which our tanks could then roll. But Oboe Hill would be our next objective, the battle for which took the lives of 90% of our company.

As I slid into my hole, I saw who was to be my companion, a young Greek boy, known as “the Greek” He was already reading his bible. From the opposite corner, I yelled to him, “Hi Greek, pray for me, too.” None too soon, because the Japs must have learned of our arrival and began artillery– mortar bombardment, nothing we had ever experienced before. We were both scared to death and clung to the ground as each shell exploded feet from our hole. After about a half hour of continuous shelling and the Greek’s furious praying, Sgt Beester slid into our hole, to calm and reassure us, the green, virginous combat replacements. He looked calmly at us and said softly, “its okay men, we weren’t made for this, but remember, we still got to take Oboe Hill, tomorrow.” His presence was certainly reassuring, as the bombardment slowed and then discontinued about the time the sun set. I guess they too were also getting hungry and wanted some rice and whatever else they ate. We heaved a sigh of relief and opened our C rations, and leaned back against the mud wall of our hole. The Sgt now left, but not before warning us that the worst was yet to come in the form of one of their nightly Banzai attacks.

Shortly before midnight, our flares began to light the sky and the world about us. And we could hear them below chanting, “Banzai, Banzai, Banzai, melican sonomobitch die tonight,” eventually, the screaming of “Banzai” – Glory to our emperor came closer, as they charged our positions, carrying rifles and concussion grenades which they activated by banging the grenade against their helmets, and then flinging themselves into one of our foxholes to blow themselves up along with the other occupants of the hole. Our automatic BARs were blasting away, along with our rifle fire to keep those maniacal, screaming Japanese soldiers away from our hole. One came from nowhere to within a few feet of us; I emptied my M1 rifle into his chest which stopped him, but I recall his face looking down at us. It looked frozen in the act of screaming, surprised, quizzical, what now in death?”

That face is engraved in my brain; a youth I killed. Do those idiots in Washington or the media have any notion of what they’re shouting about with the threat of making war, something I hope no more American youth will have to experience!