

SAIPAN
by James Collins

The Westside of Lower New York was a tough environment where most of the people made a living as dockworkers. When World War II broke out, young men from these areas flocked to the flag. They entered every branch of the service available and served valiantly all over the world.

The 27th infantry was to invade Guam in July 1944. A few weeks before the Guam invasion, three divisions of Marines assigned to invade Saipan and they expected to capture it in just a few days. Two Marine divisions were initially involved with a third held in reserve. They encountered fanatical resistance and were taking terrible casualties. Instead of putting in the third reserve Marine division, the authorities decided to divert one army division from the Guam commitment and they sent in the Army's 27th infantry. This is how Johnny Murphy from the west end of NYC entered the fray in World War II.

His combat experience lasted exactly one day and one night. On the first day the 27th infantry invaded, they met heavy resistance. John, in civilian life a promising welterweight boxer, received a Bronze Star for heroism that day. That night the Japanese infiltrated and attacked en masse with suicidal banzai charges. A Japanese grenade landed in the foxhole, crippled John for life and resulted in John getting the Purple Heart.

When John next awoke, he found himself on the upper deck of a hospital ship in the middle of the bay surrounded by the invasion fleet.

John went in and out of consciousness several times. On one occasion, he found he was occupying a bed in a room with two other marines and an unconscious Japanese prisoner. The doctor came in, examined all of them and, using trauma guidelines, decided John was the one with the worst injuries. Then he scheduled Johnny first into surgery. Next, the doctor announced the unconscious Japanese prisoner and finally the two Marines who were walking wounded with extensive wounds. The operations were to occur in that order. The marines objected strenuously and vociferously to this decision. To them a Jap was the enemy not a human being.

“Doc, the Army guy has to go first no doubt about it. Then we go next and the Jap is last.”

“Marine, it doesn't work that way on a hospital ship. I'm the officer in charge and, as a Doctor I have rules to follow. The order of medical attention I listed stands.” With that, he left the room and Johnny passed out again.

Johnny awoke much later and found himself back in the hospital room. The two marines were talking over in the corner. John had obviously been through surgery as his wounds were dressed and he could still taste the anesthesia. John noticed the two Marines and asked them, “Where did the Japanese prisoner go? Is he in surgery?”

“No, he went for a swim,” spoke the older Marine. They had thrown the prisoner over the side of the Hospital ship.

In wartime, the decisions made are often brutal and final, based on fear and hatred. The propaganda on both sides generated these emotions, as did witnessing friends chopped up by artillery barrages.

The invasion of Saipan employed 71,000 American troops. The entire Japanese garrison of 30,000 died. America lost 2,949 killed and 10,464 wounded. The battle went on for three weeks.

John survived the war with limited muscle power; spent five years in various Veteran’s hospitals and exited as a totally disabled veteran. He used a cane to handle the shriveled leg. He also lost a lung and he could not use his left arm. John passed away in the 1970s a broken but proud man. I hope and pray there is never another war like World War II or a brutal battle like Saipan.

THE END