Richard Allen Gibson

In My Father’s Shoes
Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father who served in WWII in the Pacific Theater. It is also a reflection of how a father’s love and guidance shaped who I am today. The details of his and my story are a reflection of how along life’s journey shapes who we become. I LOVE you Dad and the man who I have become…
Chapter 1 – Recollection
I'm probably going to tell more than you want to know, but since I've committed myself to reveal as best I can, from memory my tour of duty during WW II, and how it all came about. Having graduated from high school in 1943 at the grand old age of 17, which was very near the draft age, a buddy and I mounted his old 1935 Indian motorcycle and headed for Big D, that's Dallas for Texans. It was October and fairly cool, but not so cool that you didn't get your teeth full of bugs. (Oh well they're just protein). We tried to get into the Air Force but for some reason they didn't need any troops at the time. At least that's what they told us. (Probably persona non gratis eh?) Then we talked about the Navy but decided we were not well suited for salt water so in the process of elimination we wound up at the Marine enlistment center and since we were warm, they took us. Mom had a problem sending her #2 son off to war, but finally gave her consent and signed the papers. We arrived in Big D at our assigned time and I was given 14 sets of orders for 7 Texans and 7 Tennesseans.

Why me Lord? Fortunately we were all volunteers so I didn't have to worry about anyone jumping ship. Before departure from Dallas, we were given a Pullman rail car. I can't remember how many could bunk down in one of those cars but I can assure you we had no problem having a bunk to ourselves. That is until the second night when the train stopped and they loaded our car with a platoon of soldiers. Like any tired Joe, they wanted a place to bunk down no matter if the bunk was already occupied. I told some Joe a story about the plague or something like that and maintained my solidarity. (Fast thinking Roy!)

However long it took to get there, we finally made contact with San Diego, California. None of us had ever been that far from home before and things started to get exciting. First, I don't know how the word got out but there was a detachment of MP's, Military Police, waiting for us to take us to the base. I'll never know how they timed it, but there were recruits coming out of the wood-work that evening, to make up a platoon, 995 if I remember correctly. And wouldn't you know, since we were unexpected they didn't have a DI assigned to us so they canceled a sergeant's leave and gave us to him. Now, you can see that we started off on the right foot with this... MARINE can't, you? Let me say, right up front, here and now, SGT. RAY BUSHAW was the sharpest Marine I've ever seen. You Marines out there that had contact with Ray know what.

I'm talking about. Ray wasn't a really large man, probably 5 '9", 165 lbs. but sharp! I can't say for a fact but somewhere we heard that he had been a bantamweight champion boxer in the Marines. The reason I want to give tribute and respect for this
dedicated man is, he took a bunch of raw, clumsy, mostly teen-age boys and made them respond as men. One day the sergeant called me into his office just before we were to 'graduate' from boot camp and said, "Gibson, this is not like the Boy Scouts is it, I responded, "You've got that right sergeant." Then he told me I had been promoted to PFC (Private First Class for the uninformed). Scuttlebutt had it that he hated sending all those boys overseas to fight or him when he couldn't go. But my understanding is that he finally did go to Iwo Jima where he met his Lord. I shall ever be grateful to the great MARINE who taught us how to fight that we might live to see another day.

Thanks Ray!

We had to train in our civvies for a few days. No bucket, no brush, no nothing--just what we brought with us from home. The point to this is, usually the first thing that happens to a new Marine recruit is that you get uniforms (dress and work), brogans, socks, underwear and that big bucket you learned to live with. Next was the thing no noble Marine will ever forget, that first GI haircut.

Well, by the time we got all of our gear we could follow the DI's marching orders pretty good, almost to the point of being sharp (especially for recruits). So here we go for the haircut, buckets in hand, new brogans, new greens, the whole works. And the sergeant put us through all that marching stuff--obloquies and all, and as we were going through some official area the people were coming out of their offices looking (gawking may express it better). You could feel their comments, never had they seen such raw recruits doing all the stuff our sergeant had us doing. (They didn't know we had nearly worn out our civilian shoes doing what we had DRILLED into us during the previous days). Well, I got my haircut. When I came out the door of the GI barbershop, the sergeant took one look at me and took me back to the barber. With a look that only a drill sergeant can give he told that barber "Straighten up this man's hair". The first time he left me looking like a rejected washboard, some was to the scalp, some an inch or more long. I suppose I did look pretty bad before the work over. I've often wondered how many other recruits got two haircuts for the price of one.

After boot, we went to Camp Matthews for rifle training, hill climbing, sleeping in the rain and all of the other things that make a Marine happy. We had a pact among our group, "Nobody volunteers for nothing". So what's the first thing that happens when we got to Matthews and were billeted? Here comes a sergeant and asks for five volunteers. You could tell by the look in his eyes he wasn't going to leave till he got what he came for. Finally my hometown buddy and four others volunteered. They wound up doing PERMANENT KP. They slept regularly in a bunk, not in a poncho. They ate good hot meals every day, with ice cream and ooooh, don't let me think of it!!! Well, I didn't quite make expert at the rifle range, but that's all right. I think most of those experts wound up being sharpshooters and I'm glad I missed out on that calling. We finally shipped out on a pigboat for New Caledonia. I'm at the bow, looking over the railing at the porpoise in
the bow's wake. What happened? I'm feeling woozy! Seasick? Why it's as calm as a mirror out there, this can't happen to me! And it didn't. I made up my mind then and there that I was going to love the sea, ride it out, and break it, like a horse. From that day forward no matter how rough it got, I reveled in it. I was in some pretty rough seas at times. Once, we were at the edge of the typhoon that finally sunk some of the destroyers and a cruiser in the Layette Gulf. You could look almost straight up and still see water, then when you looked down you were on a mountain.

On New Caledonia, they assigned me as the company clerk, I guess because I could type. But to tell the truth, I can't recall typing a thing, not one sentence. That experience won't get me far will it? My hometown buddy (still on KP) was assigned to the 11th AA Battalion. When we found out his assignment, we went to HQ and as I was THE COMPANY CLERK, I pulled some weight, (at least 130 lbs.).

"When we joined they said we would stay together" we told the personnel making up the replacement assignments and they said, "What's he been assigned to?" The 11th Marines", I responded. Well, there's a difference between 11th AA and 11th Marines I soon found out, you -know *words mean things' so listen to what you say, closely. Well truly, that slip up was a Godsend for me because the 11th Marines is a 105 howitzer unit. You know something? I had never seen a 105 howitzer until later. You've heard of "THE REST OF THE STORY" haven't you? Well, here's part of it. I call it "THE NEXT DAY."
Chapter 2 – The Next Day
When we arrived in the Solomon's, we went to Guadalcanal. I thank God I arrived late because the first Marines to hit that isle really had a battle on their hands. After they took the island, they (that were still in a warm 'state) went to Australia for R & R. Now that part I would have liked. But it just wasn't to be. They were always tantalizing us with 'how those "Aussies" could cook STEAK AND EGGS and other good things that I cannot speak of here. Some of it could be considered "X" rated. Back to the day before the "Next Day", our arrival was quite late in the evening and as it oft does in the Pacific, it rained. Not just a little old East Texas shower, Bubba, it rained but that is why ponchos were made. When we arrived where the 11th was billeted, tents were up but there were no bunks', (cots for the uninformed). Fortunately, we had hammocks, the kind with mosquito netting and flaps to help protect you from the sun or rain (and I soon found out they kept out those big brown land crabs). One thing about those critters while I'm here, you quickly learned not to kill one of those long-eyed devils in your tent. Man they stunk to high heaven.' Besides that, they run in herds and when I say run, they were pretty fast on their feet, not straight like you or I would run, but sideways. Those that drove vehicles just loved to catch a herd crossing the road and kill as many as they could. That was fine except it kind 'a wiped out any appetite you might have had.

"The NEXT DAY", we were assigned to a 105 howitzer battery. Mine happened to be "I" Battery, 11th Marines, 1st Marine Division. Our Captain (I wish I could remember names but now I have those Senior Moments) set out to see what use he might make of the raw recruits. Especially when most of these recruits, like myself, had never seen a gun like he was explaining to us. Speaking of guns, it does not take a long to teach a Marine the difference between his rifle and his gun. The Captain) was a good Marine with nearly as much patience as Job. The first position that each of us tried was the "# I man" position. The person at that position was responsible for the elevation of
the tube (gun barrel). Fire control sends over the phone the calculated angle based on the distance and the shell charge.

(A 105 shell has seven charges. Each charge is a bag of gunpowder (not the old black stuff) of varying sizes, 7 being the largest down to 1, the smallest. The shell is semi-fixed ammo. The projectile is removed from the brass casing in order to get to the powder bags for setting the charge, which is part of a firing mission command. If my memory serves me right, the shell weighs approximately 46 pounds give-or-take a few ounces. The job of loading is the responsibility of a 'loader'. He will be handed the shell after the crew responsible for setting the ammo gets it ready. The last position we tried out for was the gunner position. The gunner uses a panoramic gun sight, which is measured off in Mills around the sight. Well I won't go into all the details for establishing the transients used by fire control but it is vitally important, (more about this later. Once the gun is 'in place' and that particular gun's azimuth is set, a 'stake' (a white and red 6 to 8 feet in length) is set out, usually to the rear, where the gunner's vision is not impaired. Once all of the above is done for each gun (4 guns to a battery), you are ready for a "FIRE MISSION". The arnmo command will be given first in order for the crew to prepare the arnmo next the elevation is given so the #1 man can get the elevation set, next the gunner will be given a command that specifies RIGHT or LEFT mills.)
Example: "RIGHT ONE TWO. ZERO" RIGHT tells the gunner to ADD 120 mills to whatever the sight's current reading. Had the command been LEFT the gunner would subtract whatever the number of mills from the sight-reading. When the gunner command is completed and the addition/subtraction is made, the gunner will use a worm gear, which has a small round wheel that has an attached rod for traversing the gun left or right. When the gunner is set on the stake (cross hairs similar to a rifle sight) he will shout 'READY') the #1 man will have made his last bubble leveling adjustment and shout 'SET'. The gun captain (usually had a corporal rating in the Marines) would inform mission control that '# X GUN IS READY'. It so happened that I could add/subtract and get ready with the best of them so they made me a gunner. I owe Coach Raymond Berry a great deal for my ability to add and subtract (not to mention multiplication) so rapidly. Coach Berry was my math teacher in high school and he was a taskmaster. If you didn't do your homework or screwed up in some other fashion, he would assign you the project, of writing out the times tables 2 through 12 a number of times.

How many times depended on how severe a punishment you deserved. In the following months some Marine might call out in the tent area "How much is 8 times 8", and I would immediately respond "64". "How'd you know that so fast Gibson?" (Never used first names) I told him "If you had written out the multiplication tables as many times as I had, you wouldn't ask." Well, my elementary teachers did give me a heads-up on math that helped me meet the COACH head-on. (God rest his soul, his son Raymond Emmitt Berry was a great professional football player).
Chapter 3 – After the Next Day
It's after 'THE NEXT DAY' now. I'm assigned to gun 4, Corporal Myers' gun (105 howitzer is a gun), got a tent in a palm grovel 6 tent buddies some that I can remember are Tex, Gomes, Fowler and Finkel, Myers, Tim, Ponatowski, Schotermer. (Sorry, Tex, I just can't remember your last name) You know, I never was called "Tex", many other names but not by that one. Gun 4's lead gunner was Corporal Fowler. Fowler was a Canadian, smaller than most of us, a really likable fellow. Now he was what you would call an "Operator". Whatever the need was, somehow Fowler would come up with it. Many of us smoked back then and the best you could hope for was Wings or some other gosh-awful smoke, but not us. Fowler would ask "What kind of smokes do you guys want?" And of course we would respond in no uncertain tones 'CAMELS, LUCKY STRIKES, and CHESTERFIELDS! Before long here he would come, not with a few cartons but with a case and always the best and freshest smokes in the battery.

WW II brought about many new weapons for Pacific island invasions. One of those was a water-or-land vehicle called a "DUCK". At that time we did not have any in the Marines, so we were assigned an Army duck manned by an army sergeant. You could just barely load a 105 into the shell of this carrier, load a few shells and board the crew. Now I assure you that when you looked at a loaded duck as I have just described you would swear that it would never float, just like a bumblebee can't fly. In fact you kinda4 got that feeling when you boarded her. She looked like/float tank and when in the water the water almost came over the fantail. Part of our training was to load the duck for an invasion and board an LST round bottomed boat. Its doors are at the bow
with a ramp for debarking. We were to go over to Pavuvu for practice landings from the LST. This was quite a different tactic for Marines and besides that it could be hazardous to your health. When the ramp of the LST was lowered into the water it was down at an approximate 45-degree angle, so if the brakes of the duck failed you could make a fast descent to the ocean bottom. I think this happened to some guns at Peleliu, but thank the Lord, not ours.

This brings me to September 1944. General McArthur wanted the 'Ole Breed' one more time to help him take back the Philippines but since Admiral Nimitz had trouble getting the 1st back under his command, he needed a campaign to maintain his control of the division. Peleliu became that campaign. The word came down that this invasion would take about three days and would be good training in preparation for landing on Japan. Well? It didn't quite work out that way. On the 14th of Sept. the Navy shelled the island but some of our support left for other duties believing we had everything under control. This left us with little support on the 15th, D Day. As the day was breaking, we could see the island, small, low in the water, not many high landmarks. The water was calm, down went the ramp and we got the signal to disembark. Our driver was good; he took that 45-degree ramp real slow. The bow of the duck went down almost up to the windshield before the bow began to rise.
Chapter 4 – Landing Day
Once we were afloat, he engaged the prop so we could move out. As we neared 
the island, we had to take it very easy because there is a reef around the island and if 
you know anything about reefs you know it can tear the bottom out of a ship or landing 
craft with no effort on its part. We helped our driver as best we could to clear the reef 
and head for the beach. The bay became a fountain of mini geysers, the Japanese 
really kicking up the water with those mortars. Many of the troops didn't make it. Good 
fortune for us though, we thought, until the Beach Master stopped us from beaching, 
said something about having no place for us to go. It seems that the Japanese were not 
giving up, as easily as some had thought. So it was back out into the bay for us. We 
waited all day long for orders to make land but the word never came.

Now a duck doesn't make much noise out there in the Pacific but when you have 
a bay full of ducks and LCTs (which are floating tanks as far as I could tell). They have 
metal tracks and when they are on the move you can't hear yourself think. What's 
worse, it got dark!! Night fell and boy it had a crushing effect on us. Did I say it got dark? 
You could hardly see your hand in front of your face. Then you would hear one of those 
LCTs and wonder if it was coming your way. We maintained watch all night and Thank 
God we did for in the middle of the night our watch alerted our driver that he thought he 
could see a big black shadow coming up the pike. We just did make it out of some large 
ship's way but his wake almost sunk us. Needless to say, as soon as we could make 
out the island by the dawning daybreak, we made for shore. Again the Beach Master 
tried to keep us from landing for lack of room on the beach but we told him we'd take 
our chances. I believe we landed on Orange Beach and moved to a point just short of 
the cemetery where we dug in.

Tex and I buddied up and dug a foxhole to wait for further orders. It was dark, it 
was late and I drifted off to sleep. Tex was in the hole before I went off to dreamland, all 
of sudden someone or something came into the hole. To say I was frightened would be 
understated. (Good thing we had been eating ole 'K' rations) I eased my rifle down 
about head level and quietly said, "Is that you, Tex?" No answer. I tightened my index 
finger just a little tighter on the trigger and said one more time, "Is that you Tex?"
Fortunately for Tex, he said "Yeah-Yeah!!" The next morning some Japanese had 
sneaked into our area and was getting ready to pitch hand grenades the way we used 
to pitch washers. "Put 'm in the hole boy!" Some sharp Marine caught sight of him and 
alerted the rest of us. Everybody stood up in his hole ready to give account for being 
disturbed. No need to worry, that wide-awake Marine got him, but good. Since we were 
awake with no place to go, we boarded our duck and moved down to the Northwestern 
end of the airport runway. Everything seemed quiet enough, when one of the crew said, 
"What's that white stuff popping out there?" "That's machine gun bullets you idiot". The 
Japanese had used Korean slaves to dig a trench there out of solid coral and we raced 
to see who could get there first. We could look up from the trench where we were 
hunkered down and see a near perfect Zero airplane sitting there by the trench. No 
doubt the Japanese had spotted us for they really sent the mortars our way. 
Fortunately, not one of those rounds hit our refuge. Sometime during that heavy
shelling, one of crew went section eight on us. I can't recall how long we took that screaming and hollering but I tell you I got a belly full. I know there were those that outranked me but since no one made a decision about that lad, he was really demoralizing everyone, the shelling was bad enough but-- so I took it on myself and called out to Tex, "Tex, let's get that stretcher from the duck and get him out of here. Since no one countered my instructions to Tex, we put him on the stretcher and away we went. Mind you now, we had our weapons and packs just in case! When we got to the beach with our load the Medic asked what was wrong with our patient and I responded "He's section eight". "Well I don't want him," "Put him to work helping you" I told the Medic. He really did need our help.

I had that last cigarette not knowing if they would see tomorrow or not. Beside this, the Japanese were shelling the beach relentlessly. We headed back for the duck. All hell broke loose around us. There were wounded and dead marines all up and down the beach. Some were smoking their last cigarette. You couldn't tell which direction it was coming from. A tank had been through that area, which left a wide shallow trench into which we jumped and did a Marine ground belly dance, we didn't crawl, we snaked it. Back at the duck I reported what we had done and no one court-martialed me so I guess we did the right thing. What else could we do?

Remember, we entered that Japanese trench in the morning with that Japanese Zero just above our heads. It looked like a brand new one when we entered but before the day was finished it was a shambles from the heavy mortar fire. By the Grace of God, not one of those mortar rounds hit our refuge. Periodically, we would stand due to the heat to get a breath of air and observe what was happening around us. We spotted a bunker at the end of the runway from which a Japanese machine gun was firing on our troops. Some spotter would inform a flame-throwing tank and they would put their flamethrower nozzle in the opening where the gun had been spotted and let loose with the flame then leave to fight in another area. The tank would not much more that leave when out would come the machine gun and open fire again. That scenario would be repeated until the tank finally put a large charge of something and blew the bunker and the firing stopped.

Sometime in the afternoon we, along with the rest of our battery, were moved to the southern end of the island next to a Japanese large caliber shore-gun. The dead crew was scattered about in the emplacement. The temperature was hot, unbelievably so, somewhere around 130 degrees and it got to me. I had a heat stroke or something that paralyzed me and was made helpless.

Many of the division had been removed from the island because they were in no condition to fight, but not me. I was carried to a little Japanese observation hut where a Major and his squad had set up their communications. I was on a stretcher being given salt pills, water and hardtack when someone cried, "There's a Japanese squad heading this way!" In my state, where was I going? Fortunately, a Marine unit cut off the Japanese and saved those of us from certain demise.
That evening about sunset, a couple of my gun crew came to the hut, made a hand saddle on to which the Major and an aid put me in their hands, literally. Back at the gun, they set me on the gun in the gunner’s position and from that point on I was the gunner. For the life of me, I can’t recall anyone telling me what happened to Corporal Fowler, the number 1 gunner of gun 4. It was impossible to dig in, as we were trained and would want to do. So we fought with what we had. About the third or fourth day those dead Japanese began to stink. I’ve smelled some awful odors in my time but none that compare to the decomposition of the human body. I can understand why Lazareth’s sisters, Martha and Mary told Jesus that after three days "he now stinketh".

Finally the bodies were removed by some brave souls and after a while we could breathe and eat again. We carried out the many fire missions we were called on to perform, so when we had a break in carrying out our duties, Finkie and I sat down and leaned back on a scrub of a tree that had the top shot out. All of a sudden there was cracking noise and Finkie fell over. I grabbed him and called out "CORPSMAN" and before the call died down our corpsman was there, stopped the bleeding put him on a stretcher and headed for the beach. When he returned I asked if Finkie would make it. In his slow Georgian accent he replied, "Yeah, but he's gonna' have one more acne scar". He informed us that had the bullet hit a fraction of an inch back it would have gone into his spinal column or a fraction of an inch forward it would have severed his jugular vein. When we got back to Guadalcanal Finkie was there and all he had was that small scar just as the corpsman had said.

I bet as the years have passed he has had quite a time trying to prove what caused that scar. Needless to say, it’s very difficult, if not impossible to sleep on that hard coral. I usually placed my head on the large tire, at my left, to grab a nap, but when fatigue becomes great enough you can sleep almost anywhere. Our sergeant stretched his hammock between two small stumps of trees, which were almost in front of the gun tubes just off the ground. His orders to us were "If you get a fire mission be sure to wake me first." Well, do you know how sound a very tired sergeant can sleep? We got the mission. We hollered, we kicked, we shook that hammock but no way could we get a response. We had to follow the command's coming down from control and when that first round went off; you've never seen a man move as fast as that sergeant. Boy! Was he PO'd at us? He couldn't hear a thing, almost shelled out of his gourd, out of that hammock he poured screaming to high heaven (and mad??). Finally, Corporal Meyers informed him what we tried to do to get him out of his sack and he settled down. We could somewhat empathize with the sergeant because a 155 howitzer gun battery set up not too far behind us and when they had a fire mission we had fire misery. If you were stretched out on the coral, those missions would bounce us around like rubber balls. Fortunately, after a few days the big guns weren't needed too often but that raised dilemma for we small artillery folk.

Some of our riflemen had endured and had taken a beating taking those coral hills and needed some relief so we were sent up to the 'Western' front. And as in WWI,
all was unbelievably quiet. What I am about to tell is one of those mysteries of war, both humorous and deadly serious. On our way to the front lines, we passed many a coral cave dug out by Korean slave labor. I'm sure.

In one fourteen foot or so cave there sat against the back wall very large Japanese in his dress uniform, clean as a pin and well groomed. The gun emplacement was solid white coral so it was obvious that the souvenirs had been removed. We made our way through the muck and mire you read about in war stories. It's hard to realize that we were there? Reaching the front, four of us relieved an outpost position which was a coral mound from which you looked up into those Jap-held positions and down at our troops. At first, we like any Marine that wanted to live, learned to keep your head and butt low. At the foot of the mound was a 57-howitzer crew that was using it like a rifle, firing at anything that moved. Then all of a sudden it was quiet. I guess the Japanese were just as tired as we were. One of the four had a deck of cards so we began to play cards, sitting up in that outpost playing cards. Can you believe it?

It was the third or fourth night and I was on watch when I looked down at the base of the coral hills where we had observed one of the many caves that infested the island. I saw a light of some kind. Knowing that no sensible Marine would expose himself with a torch, I woke my sergeant to see if he could verify what I was seeing. Sure enough, he was looking at the same thing so I wasn't hallucinating after all. The sergeant alerted those below by phone. Whoever was letting their little light shine gave us no problem. The next morning someone below called out in Korean or some other language and out filed a number of Korean slaves. Boy were they ever a happy bunch.

Well, our boys had a little rest but there seems to be no rest for the weary, here they came. No bitchin'. Just doing their thing? God bless the rifleman. They came up, passed us and all hell broke loose. I guess the Japanese had rested up as well. As the Marines advanced, we were ready to give as much cover as was possible but those Marines didn't need us. Then something humorous but deadly serious happened.

A Marine spotted Japanese behind a boulder. Grabbing a grenade from his belt, he threw it at the Japanese who immediately ran out, picked up the grenade and threw it back at the Marine, who IMMEDIATELY picked it up and realized he hadn't pulled the pin. Doing so, he tossed it back to the Japanese who headed for other ground. Shortly after the above, Peleliu was mostly secured and since we needed to get ready for the invasion of Okinawa, we recovered our guns and headed for Guadalcanal to pick up replacements.
Chapter 5 – On to Okinawa

Next, Okinawa and three words that saved my life! Then China and why it's Red.

As I promised in my first treatise, I found myself to tell the rest of the story. Back on Guadalcanal we got our replacements. There really were not too many in our ranks because we were most fortunate in the last campaign. The only one I can think of is our Canadian friend, Corporal Fowler. I still do not know what happened to him to this day. I never asked and no one volunteered to tell. April Fool's day was nearing and we had another date with the Japanese on Okinawa. By that time we were well oriented to LST (Landing Ship Troops) transportation because it took considerable time to get from one place to another. Top speed was probably no more than 10 or 12 knots. Well, we got there and the Japanese suicide pilots were out in numbers, but they had bigger targets in mind than small LSTs so our landing was uneventful. Our assigned duty was to take the middle part of the island where the airport was located. By the time we (the artillery) got ashore, the Marine riflemen had already reached the other side of the island meeting little or no resistance.
Finding no enemy, we awaited further orders. We had one Marine in our battery that was a foxhole digger, stop for any length of time and he was busy digging a hole. Just before dusk we heard the drone of a plane's engine that was unfamiliar and looking on the horizon we spotted a Japanese zero going south. All of a sudden he made a sharp bank to the right and came straight at us. Fortunately it was not like the coral on Peleliu and by that time our foxhole-digging buddy had a good size hole in the ground. When the zero looked as if he was zeroing in on us, in the hole went two Marines, him, with me on top. The zero made another sharp turn to the right over us and had I had a brush full of paint, I could almost have painted his wing. He was heading for the airport, not realizing that our troops had control. Upon landing he received an April Fools surprise for they blew the plane and its occupant to smithereens.

The next day we received orders to go south and help our Army brothers, so off we went. Our first position was on a westward slope at an elevation overlooking the bay with all of the ships and we could watch the Japanese suicide planes trying to take them out. Of course the ships were firing at the planes and when a zero or Betty bomber came in low along the shore, those of us on land had to take cover because the shells that missed the Japanese did not stop - they came on into land and played havoc with us. Again, we were fortunate for none landed in our area.

In the evening when things were getting quiet, I loved to stand on the mound of dirt of the gun pit and sing to the troops. The sunsets in the Pacific were gorgeous and made one happy and thankful to be alive so I usually sang the old western song "Ridin' down the canyon to watch the sun go down a picture that no artist ere could paint". The troops seem to like my serenading, especially when we were on watch. I would hold a request hour and sing almost any song asked for. My mother had purchased one of the first Philco console radios that had push button dialing so I grew up on the music of the day, the Lone Ranger and the Inner Sanctum. The most requested song of the day was always "Ole Shep". They never seem to tire of hearing about that good and faithful dog. By the way, I still remember and sing the words after 87 years of age, my thanks to the Lord. Enough of that, now.
A few days into the campaign, they moved us forward to relieve a 75mm howitzer battery. Remind you now, a 105mm replacing a 75mm unit. The smaller guns were frontline support that is how close we were to the enemy. Some of those days were hectic to say the least but we hung in there. The Army 75mm gunner was a sergeant where most of our gunners were PFC, just thought I would throw that in.

Isn't it amazing how time slips away? I do not remember how many days we had been engaged in battle, the days just ran together. I can remember our mission in particular. Things were moving along quiet well against the enemy and the higher echelon of fire command came up with the idea. Every type of support, artillery and mortar, were about to engage in a mission that would literally shake the ground. This was to be a demoralizing effort against the Japanese troops and one that raised the curiosity of we artillery personnel. An area where there was a heavy concentration of the enemy was chosen for the mission. Every spotter and fire command group wanted to test their skills so each plotted their own units so that when the fire command came down, all of the shells would hit the targeted area at the same time.

Can't you just picture this challenge? Here we are, scattered all over the southern end of the island, yards and miles separating us. What a geometry and physics test that was going to be. It was planned as a night mission when most concentrated effort had ceased, I do not remember the exact hour but all anxious to hear the results. Now, for each shell to reach the target at the same time, you would have to take the designated time of impact and calculate, based on the number and type of powder, velocity, elevation etc. From our command came the order, "stand by", they had already calculated what charge of powder we would use, the number one men had been given their elevation, the gunners had been given sight adjustments, we were loaded and ready? If I remember correctly, midnight had been chosen as impact time, our command came down "Battery—Fire". What an awesome moment. From the areas around, you could hear the staggering sound of guns and mortars in action. Then the telling moment, everything was quiet when all of sudden the ground shook. It was an exhilarating time. That is not to say that every projectile hit the target at the same instant but it was close enough when you weigh the challenge.

I told you in the previous treatise that I would tell you of the three words that saved my life. The day came as every other day and we were called on for a mission. That day Tim (one of the few called by their first name) a young replacement asked if he could be the loader that day. He was a handsome young Marine of Italian extraction, olive complexion, black hair, a real Rudolf Valentine type. The girls were crazy about him I'm sure. The gun captain gave him his opportunity and he was elated.

Some of the ammo we received had bent brass casings, which was a normal occurrence so when you jammed the shell into the tube it would not completely seat itself in order for the number one man could close the breech of the gun. When this occurred, one of the men on the trail of the gun would hand the loader the trail spike (a device used to move the trails) and he would tap the casing into the tube. On that
mission we had a jam and the spike was handed to Tim. I was sitting on the gunner's trail as I had done many times before and gave it no thought. That day something different happened; as Tim was tapping the shell into the tube I distinctly hear three words. "GET UP ROY!" Had I not gotten up, metal and powder that went into my lower body would have obliterated my head, probably to the point of death. To some of you, that may be hard to comprehend but to me it was the Lord or my Guardian Angel. You see, I'm a Christian and the Lord was not through with me yet. The shell exploded. When I came to my head was in the lap of our Colonel and my body was a shamble. The mouth was a wad of cotton. A corpsman was there almost immediately and shot me with morphine. Some shock had also settled in, so with that and the morphine I felt little pain. I do remember seeing Golems (number one man) holding his hands over his face with blood coming out between his fingers.

Someone told me that Tim had both arms blown off but he got up and was running away when a corpsman caught him to give him aid. I can't tell you what ever became of Tim but I hope he has not had it too rough. I was carried to an aid station. There I was, lying on a stretcher, with wounded and dead all around. I was transported somehow to the beach to be put on the hospital ship Liberty. Wounds are bad enough but the thing that gave me the most trouble was not being able to pee. I was in an upper bunk with a wounded Marine below and he had the same problem as I. To relieve us,
the corpsmen would cauterize us. The Marine below evidently had a very small bladder for he could not go long between procedures without crying out for help. The thing that solved my problem was an enema; I could not remember how long it had been since I had relief.

I wound up in a hospital on Saipan where I could look across the bay and see Tinian and the airport where the Enola Gay took off for Hiroshima. In fact, I believe to this day that I saw her and her escort bomber take off on that unforgettable flight. Earlier though one night they brought in part of a flight crew that had ditched their plane on takeoff. Most of them did not make it.

As for me, I stunk to high heaven. I could not shower because of the wounds. The left elbow would not heal so they did a skin graft on it taking about 20 pinches of my right groin area. All but a couple of them took so I'm fortunate that I did not lose any bodily functions (although it was close). Some doctor(s) thought I had other problems for I wound up in a section eight ward. I told the WOMAN nurse that I was in the wrong place, "I'm supposed to be in the lost hearing ward". She just smiled and said, "That's what all you men say". In that ward, any oriental would have been In deep water. Some of the men in that ward were downright mean, and they still had their knives!

Some days later, a cadre of doctors came to check me out "upstairs". I reiterated that they had me in the wrong place. But to tell you the truth, there are days I cannot
account for so at that time anything is possible. Some are not too sure about me today and there have been times when I ask myself, "What am I here for". They never did check my hearing, which only happened in later years as the ringing and dizziness continued. A gentlemanly veteran Doctor Wolf in Houston upon examination told me I would just have to learn to live with my problems. He wished he could help but the best he could do for me was to send me to the Methodist hospital for hearing test. Over the years I've been grateful to him for the compassion shown to me.
Chapter 5 – China
The bomb had been dropped, the war was over, and I thought I would be shipped home. Not so fortunate. I boarded an old C47 to Guam and from there back to Okinawa. This is the time I spoke of where a typhoon gave some of our destroyers and cruisers a rough time, sinking some of them. I was on an LST again, wouldn't you know. I took a lesson from my hometown buddy on this trip, I volunteered for KP. Up until this time they would not let me do KP, if you can believe it. Why, I don't know. That way I had access to the kitchen and the accoutrements it offered. That typhoon finally caught up with us. At least the tall end of it and it did and it was really rough, but we made it or I would not be writing this.

Back with my unit I was made a corporal and given my old gun four and its crew. Then we were informed that we were going to China to give the Japanese protection from the Chinese as they were evacuated. Talk about irony! In the process of getting ready for our next operation, we had to get some vaccinations. The infirmary was some distance from where we were billeted and from there you could see our men taking off in a dead run about halfway back to the tent area. And we wondered why? It did not take long for us to find out, because at that halfway point we were hit by a burning that's hard to explain. I do not know to this day what the shots contained but I've had all of that I want.
Back to the LST again, almost getting to be like home! As we entered the Yellow Sea, we came to realize how it got its name. There wasn't a ripple in sight other that what the boat was making and it was Yellow. It must be from the silt and mud that drains into that body of water. We made our way to harbor and went inland to Tensien, China. We could now say that we were Old China Marines and that would not be stretching the truth, China is Old and we are Marines, right? Where we were billeted had been the quarters of the Japanese. I do not know how long they were occupied by the Japanese but they were as clean as a pin. They had the customary thick reed or straw floor covering so we learned to remove our shoes upon entering our abodes. Where we bathed was the community bathhouse where the water was very hot and very welcomed. It was wintertime in China and since we were at the foot of the Siberian mountains, it was colder that a well digger's butt in Alaska.

When we had leave and went into the city, the first thing we did was to get a small bottle of vodka to use as antifreeze. Since I was a corporal, they made me the sergeant of the guard. Makes a lot of sense doesn't it? As sergeant of the guard, I had more time off so I used my time looking out for my men. I raised a lot of cane about the hours of duty they had to endure, even volunteered to take their place but to no avail. Besides that, on the excursions they had to make inland to bring out the Japanese was dangerous because the Red Chinese army was giving them hell shooting at them. I loved my men in the tradition of Sergeant Ray Bushaw.

Some of the men began to be shipped home for dismissal based on the point system. I was 5 points shy of having enough to go home. Someone told me that a Purple Heart was worth 5 point so I went to my Captain and asked if I was qualified for the Purple Heart due to my injuries. He was surprised that I had not already been given the Heart. He proceeded to execute the order to get me the Heart, which made me eligible to go home. Then, finding out I was going to execute my option of going home, the said; "Gibson, if you will ship over we will make you top sergeant". I said, "Hang 'em on me".

At 20 years old that probably would have made me one of the youngest 1st sergeants ever. Then they chickened out on me, said, "Well give you three up and one down for now but you will be acting 1st sergeant". I told them that all I had done was act since I had been in the Marines. PFC acting as a corporal, a corporal acting as a sergeant, now they want to make me a sergeant and act as top sergeant. Mind you, I love the Marine Corps but this in your face type of training was not and is not my cup of tea. It just wasn't Ray's way of making a Marine.

My men wouldn't let me leave without having a drink with them, to the point that I remember little even as to how my buddies put me on the US General House and we came home. My biggest mistake on leaving the Corps was upon discharge. Each Doctor examining us before discharge had to have a look at me. The Chief Surgeon offered to send me up to Pendleton and give me a good going over but I made the
mistake of telling him if it was OK I would just as soon got home. He granted that wish, and really, I have no regrets. (I should have gone to Pendleton).

Semper Fi!
Chapter 6 – Reflection
As I reflect on my father’s story, it makes me so grateful for all the men and women who have served, many giving their lives so that we can live in freedom today. I am honored to have a father who served in many pacific theaters and by the grace of GOD I am here today!

As I look down at the black shoes that were once my father’s I realize that he has some big shoes to fill. He lived and served in honor, trust and a faith that stands on its own. He has been the greatest influence in my life. He entrusted me to tell his story.

My desire is to honor my father. May all those who read this experience hope, perseverance and faith. I am confident that those who see his uniform in the museum in Paris, Texas will see a man who served us all in the pursuit of freedom.

Thank You Dad!

Your Son...