



Spring 2009

Welcome Readers, wherever you are. This new editor lives up North in Cambridge, MN, where winter is not over until it is *over*. The weather forecast is “expect a snow accumulation of 6 inches by midweek.” So it isn’t over. It *might* be by the time of the next quarterly newsletter.

EDITORIAL STAFF CHANGE

As you learned from Rowland late last Fall, due to declining health Rowland asked that someone step up and relieve him of the task of publishing the quarterly newsletter that he has carried on since Russell Gross had to be relieved of the duty for a similar reason. One of my downfalls that was pounded into me upon arriving in recruit depot, San Diego in 1942 (Do not volunteer) that I have not been able to adhere to on an occasion or two. Visiting with Rowland about Christmas time, I learned from him that no one agreed to give him a hand and he said he might just have to close the book. Regardless of my early warnings, I told him no, I will take over the responsibility. We cannot close the book, not yet! A letter was drafted and mailed to members and family whom I didn’t have an email address for, and for those who have email addresses a similar message was sent via email in which I asked for personal information from all for adding personal treasures for all to enjoy to the newsletter. I was very pleased for the responses submitted by nearly 10% of our members and family in telephone calls and emails. This and future newsletters will tell the stories that have been furnished, and others yet to be made available. I shall look for your treasures to be sent to me via USPS and/or emails

DEDICATION

This copy is dedicated to each and every Marine that wore 314 on his sea bag and dungarees; and especially to my predecessors who worked hard to keep each of us, you and me, informed as to what was in store for us since our return to civilian life. I am speaking of Russ Gross, the instigator, and Rowland Lewis, the postmaster, who together sent us the newsletters for the last 50 years or more years. It is an honor that I take seriously and will carry on until (?) I want you all to know our efforts would be naught without Joline Doersam, daughter of John Seymour, who prints and mails the letters. And I am sure everyone knew John very well.

For those who may not know, C123rd.com (the web site) exists because Rowland created it for those of us who presented personal stories to him and John to help preserve our history, which will be available for future students interested in what we witnessed during our service in the C123rd of WWII. You should also know that the (electronic) history book chapters originally compiled by John and Rowland will remain open for additions after we are gone, by the dear friends Jeremy and Sherrie Quick Ferguson. They have volunteered to take over management of the website for Rowland, to present the entire historical file to the USMC Historical foundation, and in addition will continue the site in much the same manner that Rowland did. Let’s have a round of heartfelt applause for Rowland, Jeremy, and Sherrie. How are we so fortunate to find friends so Pro-USMC as Jeremy and Sherrie? Here’s the connection: Sherrie’s grandfather was the cousin of Merle Quick, my fire group leader who gave his all in combat on Saipan. And that’s the truth, S.H.M.G. C123rd.com was financed by

Rowland, and now the costs associated with operating a web site have been taken over by Jeremy and Sherrie. (I'd like to hear from our members a plan for compensating G & S.)

NEW PRESIDENT AND REUNION INFO

It is easy to see that this issue will end up as two or more pages because there is much more that has to be covered in this issue. For instance, the upcoming reunion needs some space.

As you know, Henry Koellien (1-3-25), who was elected president of the Fighting Fourth Marine Div. Association of WWII at last year's 61st reunion in Fredericksburg, VA suddenly became very ill and died before he could fulfill his term as our president for 2008-2009. Our 62nd reunion was to bring us back to San Diego, but before our arrangements were in place the reunion site was changed to Reno, Nevada, where Dale Cook (the PP of 2007-2008) is reunion chair. The headquarters hotel will be at the *Circus Circus* hotel. The reunion dates are September 8-13, 2009. Succeeding to the office of President is Austin Geiling, member of E-2-24, and who has been our USMCGMAN@aol.com. This new location, dates and chair info ere provided to me by Austin, so it's the real thing.

IN RESPONSE TO MY LETTER ANNOUNCING THE FORMATION OF CLOSE RANKS

About ten percent of the 43 surviving members of the C123rd, and about 30 family members listed on our company roster called, wrote or sent emails supporting my continuance of the newsletter and theme to *close ranks*, and to get to know each other a little bit more than we do. Some were a little more enthusiastic than others about including personal things of interest in their lives outside or included in their war experiences. I was especially pleased to receive a personal note from Captain Eberhardt's sister, Margaret Wilson, who says she isn't very handy with emails but she's agreeable to share memories of her brother and C123rd members who have visited with her over the years, naming Jim Tobin, Don Latsch, and Russell Gross. I am anxious to share her input with the rest of this Marine family.

LET'S MEET A FEW OF OUR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

To get the ball rolling let's learn a little about Rowland Lewis. Today he makes his home in San Jose, CA, and of course as you read above you have learned of his more recent activities with the C123rd. Following is one of his experiences I was not aware of until recently. By Jan. 7, 1947, Rowland was ready to reenlist in the military, this time as a SO/Sgt in the US Army. A few weeks later he was deployed as the NCO in charge of several enlistees being transferred by rail from Scott Field, IL to Ft. Lewis, WA. Traveling under government orders his troops were provided a sleeping car on a train powered by a steam engine from Chicago by way of Minnesota. Leaving Chicago the train Rowland and his troops were on led the way and as evening set in and the troops were bedded down Rowland made his way to the club car at the far end of the train. Outside a snowstorm was raging as two trains were traveling the same route on a schedule with a supposedly built-in safety factor separating them. With zero visibility the lead train's engineer reduced speed, but the engineer of the second train failed to do so. Rowland had barely a sip of brew when the following train's steam belching engine came crashing into the club car and sent Rowland flying! Fearing an explosion or scalding steam, he and another passenger opened a window and exited immediately. Both trains were virtually stopped and several passengers were shivering in shirt sleeves, and assisting others until help arrived. Finally back to his sleeper car, Rowland found his enlistees shaken up pretty badly. The sleeper car was a mess, but otherwise they were okay. Continuing travel was delayed a few days while a new train was assembled. They arrived at Ft. Lewis several days later than previously scheduled.

Shortly after, Rowland joined the American occupation forces in Japan. Except for 15 months that Rowland spent in Korea during the Korean war, his second enlistment covered 16 years, mostly in Japan. Along with his 4 years in the US Marines, his services to our country's military forces totaled 20 years. Leaving Japan he brought back to the USA the love of his life and a real fine lady, Keiko, his bride, whom many of us have had the pleasure of meeting and love the company of at several reunions.

Gale Abbott:

Gale makes his home in Falls Church, VA. He and his wife Gail were married in 1942, and he says they have 3 children, 9 grandchildren, and 24 great grands. They are very proud of all their family, and several have served and are still serving proudly in the US Navy. Gale will be 92 next October and Gail will be 91 at her birthday in June.

Here's what he said about C123: "The few months with C123 were my favorite tour of duty, with such a great bunch of guys." In 1945 when the Marine division headed home, he did not have enough points to go along, and was sent to Okinawa. There, nary a building remained upright; it was a wasteland. Today, he reports, it is a thriving metropolis. After a year he too came home and was discharged in 1946, and managed his father's business with his father. But he missed the Corps, so with help from the best man at his wedding, (a Sgt Major at Quantico,) he reenlisted and designed supply as his career choice. That is how he began his 30 years of service in the corps. He served in several capacities and duty stations – as a recruiter, as the 1st Sgt of an infantry company, and had several tours overseas and in the US, Korea, and Viet Nam, retiring at he rank of Sgt Major at Camp LeJeune in 1970. He and his wife lived and have traveled extensively throughout the USA, except for Alaska and Rhode Island, and all of Canada except for Nova Scotia. Gale is quite the guy!

Eugene Rackovitch:

Gene and Harriet reside in Greenport, New York. Gene has published two books and had a few drafts of future books. I have in my library his *Marines and Renegades*, which is dedicated to unheralded men of the 9th Defense battalion and the 9th Anti Aircraft Artillery battalion, FMF. His novel is based on experiences he witnessed during his tour in Guam after leaving C123rd in WWII. I'm looking to report whatever he is willing to share to *Close Ranks*.

Guy F. Rowe:

Guy is another Marine that did not get enough life from what he experienced on Iwo, and he later joined the US Army where he enjoyed military life to the full. He and his wife, Evelyn, who passed away within the last year, traveled the country extensively and shared their experiences wherever they went. Guy introduced me to the Metro Marines, a local Marine organization for all Marines of all eras. I am indebted to him for that, and for the friendships it inspired. He told me he would get right on it and send me some life experiences to share, but I am still waiting!

Each of you, survivors and family members are encouraged to share.

Orvel E. Johnson: (The Editor)

This has grown to good size and I'll give you just a bit of my life in this newsletter but more in later copies. I have et to find any Marine other than myself who has met one of our deadly enemy troops in person since the end of WWII. Akio Tami, AKA "Pistol Pete" by Marines on Guadalcanal was the imperial Japanese army officer in charge of the artillery that shelled the American forces holding Henderson field for an extended period of time. (I'll try to compress facts to the minimum.)

There are several scenarios that play here , the earliest at Guadalcanal, which I stated above. The second scenario took place on Saipan, where I took the neatly wrapped flag from between the helmet liner and the top of the dead Japanese soldier's helmet and shoved same into my pack. The third scene occurred in the early 1980s, when it was published that veteran combatants of both countries forces returned to the various islands' battle grounds and met and exchanged personal battlefield souvenirs. I thought this was a very nice act to do. I took out my flag on which 138 Japanese painted words adorned the edges beyond the red sun in the center. No one knew that I was a Japanese linguist so the messages it contained were a mystery to all I had previously shown it to. I discussed this with my friend Rick Spooner, USMC Maj, Ret., a member of the 2nd Mar. Div. with whom my squad and his has passed through each other's column on D-Day on Saipan, June 15, 1944. (Rick and his wife own and operate *The Globe and Laurel* restaurant on Jefferson Davis Hwy near Stafford, VA, and just outside of the Quantico Marine base. Officers of several countries with whom the US is friendly attend officer training and carry on joint programs with these foreign troops who are frequently invited to dinner at the *Globe*.) Officers in training from Japan and other officials connected with the departments of history cooperate, and Rick kept my flag exchange plan in mind when Japanese officers attended his restaurant. The possibility of connecting with someone who would be willing to accept my flag and return it to Japan in an attempt to reach the family of the soldier whose flag I had was exciting.

Next scenario: Well-to-do Japanese citizens had been financing archeologist groups to search the battlefields for remains of their soldiers who had died during the war. Akio Tami was just such a person and during several of his searches had crossed paths with US Marine corps historians and such who found him to be a very knowledgeable person who might help identify, explain and catalog battlefield equipment that understood by Americans. Rick was informed by friends stationed at Quantico that Akio Tami would be brought over for lunch and that I should be there at the same time to meet Akio. I was there, and met him, and asked through interpreters first of all what the paintings represented, and if told who the soldier was, what city might be revealed, and if he could take it back to Japan on his trip home to see if it could be returned to the members of the soldier's family. He laid the flag flat on the table and with a small pen light for several minutes he studied the markings then explained their meanings to the interpreter. The soldier's name and other significant things were all there. This soldier was not just a civilian soldier, he was a Samurai from a family of Samurais. The paintings were made by friends prior to his leaving home and going to fight for the emperor's honor, to bless him with safe passage and a successful sojourn and safe homecoming. He stated it was an honorable thing I wanted to do but he would not do it, because it was my war treasure! Several times I told the interpreter I wanted him to return the flag to his country and family. With three offers his answer was no, but on the fourth he gathered together the flag and zipped the closure on his briefcase with the flag inside. The interpreter explained that a Japanese person of stature had to be asked beyond three times to accept a gift, before he was sure the offer was the correct thing to accept. On another newsletter I will follow up with events that followed. There is much more. Following newsletters will be abbreviated – hopefully!

In closing, Sherrie Ferguson, the new C123rd web site manager has asked me to request that you send pictures that depict you survivors today and who you were during your days in training, combat hospital recovery, or whatever. Now is the time to share these pictures with America. You mail email them to her at frenchbleu@hotmail.com or send them by post to:

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Semper Fi,
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