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The newsletter for Marines of C-1-23rd of the Fourth Marine Division Association of WWII

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Merry Christmas From your CLOSE RANKS Staff.

(Special Feature Story of Rod Rodriquez "The Battle for Iwo Jima". This has been edited to conserve space in this issue. To read Rod's complete experience, see C123rd.com. I'm sure all will find it interesting to compare his story with yours. -Editor)

THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA

My full name is Arthur W. Rodriquez. I was born in the small town of Morenci, Arizona. During my youth my goal was to become a United States Marine and when World War 2 began I was 15 years old, living with my father in Los Angeles, California. I attempted to enlist right away but was turned away and told to come back when I was 17.

On the date of my enlistment, August 10, 1943, I was 17 and sent to Recruit Depot, San Diego for my Boot Camp training. I did very well in training, earning the Expert Rifleman Badge, and upon graduation I was promoted to PFC. From that time on through active duty, I have preferred the name "Rod" Rodriquez.

On September 18, 1943, I and my boot camp buddy, Richard Grider reported to the 4th Marine division stationed at Camp Pendleton and were assigned to the Service Battalion. As members of this unit, our muscles were needed more than our rifle skills. We loaded and unloaded ships during the Marshall Island Campaign and for establishing Camp Maui and in June and July 1944 were on the beach at Saipan and Tinian. During these 3 campaigns we were subjected to artillery shelling of the landing beaches but were not involved in combat so on our return to Maui Richard Grider, I, and our buddy since Boot Camp, Ward, requested to be transferred from the Service Battalion to a rifle company. It was granted, and we three joined C123rd and took training with the Browning Automatic Rifle. We were assigned as BARs in 3 fire teams in the 1st platoon. I was in Cpl Lloyd Prevatte's fire team, Richard Grider in Cpl Morris Fusco's team, and Ward in Cpl Ed Rajkowski's. After a few months of additional training we sailed to the Northern Pacific island of Iwo Jima, the 4th Division's 4th assignment.

En route, Capt Stanley McDaniel, CO of C123rd distributed a map of Iwo Jima along with a model of the island and briefed us on what we might find on the island and told us it was estimated we should take the island in 5 days, based on what was known at the time taken from aerial photos that had been recently provided. In the plan for landing the First squad of the 1st platoon was scheduled to hit land in the first wave on the extreme left of our division. To our left should be elements of K company, 5th Marine Division with whom we must establish and maintain contact, once we were ashore. Our initial objective would be to take control of the first airfield directly to our front and continue to cut across the island separating Mount Suribachi from the major part of the island.

As we approached the island from our Amptrac we witnessed the massive bombing and shelling of Suribachi, the beaches and apparently everything else obliterating the features of the entire island, and we wondered how anyone could survive such a destructive force. Of course many did survive as we found out. As we neared the designated landing sites on the island, Japanese coastal defense artillery concentrated its saturating fire on the approaching Amptracs attempting to knock us out before we made land. Some landing craft were hit but ours made it. As soon as our Amptrac stopped we rushed out and as best we could race toward the 1st terrace about hundred yards from the water's edge for protection along the leading edge. What we didn't know but encountered immediately was the consistency of the soil, the volcanic sand was nearly impossible to get footing for our troops, vehicles and tanks. For some time there was no word from command until we heard from Morris "Tony" Fusco our 1st change of leadership. Tony took charge ordering us to advance on to the first airfield, some 200 yards.

Our original squad leader was a D Day casualty during landing, and Grider automatically took charge of his fire group team. On the way forward we saw a number of 5th Division men that had already been killed by enemy snipers. At the edge of the airfield the 1st squad was ordered to dig in on or near the flat surface of the airfield. Word was passed that our platoon leader had also been a casualty all within the first 2 hours on land. Four of our tanks approached from the beach area and Japanese mortar shells began raining down around the tanks which continued on toward our position bringing the mortar barrage to us. The first tank was hit when as it reached the runway surface and as the second tank attempted to go around the on fire first tank, it too was hit in its tread disabling it. Tanks 3 and 4 stayed below the height of the airfield as mortars continued to rain on their position and ours. The immediate area was covered with Japanese dead in trenches, craters and entrances into caves, which we assured ourselves that they were dead using

bayonets and hand grenades. We set up our night's defense along the edge of the airfield. Expecting infiltrating or an after dark counter attack, water cooled machine guns were dug in with us. A heavy artillery and mortar exchange continued all night but no attack.

We held this same position for the next couple days and nights to enable other units to overcome heavy enemy resistance in their area and attempt to consolidate our position on the first airfield. Many of our troops became casualties by stiff resistance without seeing live enemy forces, the 24th and 25th Marines took our place on the line and we were considered in Reserve. Whether in reserve or on the line made no difference- there was no place on the island that wasn't under fire. On the 4th or 5th day we advanced across to open area, with fixed bayonets, and screaming and yelling to the leading edge of the second airfield.

On the 6th day I and a group of us were sent to the beach for food, water and grenades. On the way as we passed an Aid Station a lone corpsman called for help to bandage a Marine whose stomach was a wide open wound that the corpsman bandaged - with a little help from me. We continued on our assignment and sent a stretcher to the Aid Station. On our way back with supplies, we passed a large crater with as many as ten dead Marines with missing body parts also scattered around. These were casualties of the heavy shelling of the night before which passed over our foxholes found and killed these marines. Up to now we had little to show for the casualties we had taken and now the 5th Marines were making progress.

On day 7 (D+6), we were back in the front moving toward Radar Hill when enemy mortars began firing shells that gave off yellow smoke and smelled like sulfur, and then switched to white phosphorous. We scattered and took shelter, several in a large trench. From the rim of a trench, Corporal Prevatte gestured for me to join him in the trench. I declined and settled in a small crater near by. A moment later two mortar shells dropped on the edge of the trench. When the dust settled, Prevatte was sitting there with his left arm hanging from a thread. With his right hand he grabbed the left and tossed it away. Grider had been blown from where he sat near the rim. He had many shrapnel wounds but didn't appear to have any life threatening wounds. Several others were killed or wounded. Tony Fusco was wounded. Ed Rajkowski became the squad leader, I was now the fire team leader with a BAR, and our platoon leader, who replaced our original Platoon leader on D Day, was a casualty. Those of us that were not wounded helped our corpsman attending other wounded and carried or walked that day's casualties to the beach. When I last saw Prevatte, he was on the beach being helped into the landing craft to take him off of Iwo and he wished me luck. This was our costliest day in lives and wounds, to date, and there were only 3 of us left from the original squad.

My last day on that hell hole, was another day of danger. You will find it at C123rd.com

(As editor I urge you to go on the Web to read it on C123rd.com. It will be well worth your time to do so. -Orv)



GOOD ONE LINERS *CONTRIBUTED BY GALE ABBOTT*

1. The nicest thing about the future is it always starts Tomorrow.
2. Money can buy a fine good dog but only kindness can make his tail wag.
3. A person without a sense of humor probably has no sense.
4. Seat belts are not as confining as a wheelchair.
5. A good time to keep your mouth shut is when you are in deep water.
6. No one has a more driving ambition than a boy who wants to buy a car.
7. There are worse things than getting a phone call at 4 A.M. especially if it is the correct number.
8. It is only a game if your team is winning.
9. Trouble with bucket seats is, not everybody has the same size bucket.
10. After 60, if you don't wake up aching in every joint, you probably died during the night.

MAIL CALL

Postmarked 28 August 2009 from **JOHN E. MATTSON** C123rd.

"Hello Orvel,

I want to thank you for sending the C123rd newsletter to me with inserts of correspondence received from the C123rd members of the 4th Marine Division of World War II. You do a heck of a nice job sharing C123rd letters and photos. They are great.

I only attended just one reunion and it was the one held in Minneapolis at the Raddison South. I don't remember meeting you and buddy, I do want to meet you.

I was born and raised between Isle and More in central MN. After my discharge from the Marine Corps, I moved to and have lived in Minneapolis ever since. Got married at age 30 and still am, but life hasn't been so good the last 25 years. I've been a painter all my life, only because it was the best work I could get.

We had 2 boys, oldest 52, youngest 48. The bad news, last September 2, 2008, the youngest came home when we weren't here, took the 12 gauge, and went into the back yard. He must have knelt down, put the shotgun to his head and killed himself. Upon coming home, I looked out the kitchen window and saw him lying there but nothing seemed wrong. I went up to him and put my hand on him before I saw his brains were laid out beside his neck. I almost went crazy. Police put me in the hospital under constant watch for 7 days. I still can't get over it. All I saw on Iwo did not affect me anything like this. This still haunts me.

Say hello for me at Reno to all the men, especially Carroll Gregory, my foxhole buddy. We both carried some of my ammo. I'll try to stop in and see you this fall. Take care, John M."

Surprise! Pleasant Surprise!

November 20, 2009, I was home and about 11:30 in the morning I answered the doorbell and there stood **John E. Mattson** who handed me a post card to introduce himself. I recognized the card immediately. The handwriting on it was mine, one I had mailed to him earlier in the fall. He identified himself stating he was Jack Mattson, from Bloomington, a member of C123rd and had come to meet me. As stated above, I was surprised that he had driven some 50-60 miles to visit with me unannounced. He was invited to come and set, at the kitchen table. We had a lot to talk about. We had found a new friend and for an hour and a half we covered many sea stories from 1945.

We had not met during the war (that we could remember) because Jack joined C123rd after Tinian and at the time I was hospitalized in the Naval Hospital (US Navy MOB 8) on Guadalcanal, and Jack was gearing up at our Maui Tent Camp, 4th Marine Division's overseas' Base for the next phase of 4th Division's war plan. When I was discharged at Guadalcanal, I was taken to Oaknoll Hospital in Oakland CA and from there to Balboa Park Hospital, San Diego. Then in January 1945 I was sent to Marine headquarters at the Charleston Navy Yard, while Jack along with the division sailed for Iwo Jima. Jack was originally in D123rd, which merged into C123rd throughout the battle of Iwo Jima. Jack was a BAR, like I had been and had a very bad experience with his weapon jamming frequently due to the light sand that got into everything. He decided to trash his BAR when he had an opportunity to take out a Jap machine gun had it fired. Instead 2 of his buddies, Harry Hansen and Joe Falcone were wounded by the same machine gunner before he could clear the round and resume firing. As soon as he got his hands on an M1 he got rid of the BAR.

Before he departed he told me his 84th birthday will take place next April, that he was one of the youngest Marines on Iwo.

A day or so later as I was researching something else, I ran across a music book I had fixed up to entertain the troops at the 1991 reunion in Minneapolis. The cover sheet is filled with signatures of C123rd members at our exclusive C123rd dinner. Right smack on top is the signature of John E. Mattson. I have since reminded him of the party where Elvin Johnson, the harmonica player and I, the costumed Leprechaun enjoyed ourselves, entertaining. Comments on the cover sheet attests we had fun and C123rd members had fun. Jack has not responded since I told him where I found his name. I must confess, I did not recall meeting him in 1991.

MAIL CALL

*The sister of **Merrill Quick, Phyllis Garsino**, sent to **CLOSE RANKS** the second letter Merrill had sent to his parents from Boot Camp on the 4th of July, 1943 to share with the readers of C123rd **CLOSE RANKS**. Merrill was this editor's Fire Team Leader, who was the first member of the First squad of the First Platoon of C123rd to be killed by a Japanese sniper on the third day on Saipan, June 17, 1944. It will bring back some personal memories.*

Dear Mother Dad and Sis,

I received your letter and the one from Bob, and was glad to hear you are all well. So you have a bull calf now and you say the pigs are getting big. Time has gone pretty fast for me as we never know when we'll fall out and we are kept on the jump all the time. This Sunday is what they call "crap out day", or a day of rest. It is the first of three Sundays we have had a chance to lie around and it sure feels good. Everyone went to church today. There was one kid that said he was a heathen and didn't want to go to church and the Corps made him Swab the deck. The "deck" is the floor, "chow" is mealtime, catsup is "red lead" and we have a 100 other expressions. I signed up for the engineers and they told me I had a good chance of getting in the camouflage department. We are going to the rifle range next Saturday if nothing goes wrong. And I am getting along fine but sure am anxious to get home on that 10 days furlough to see you folks. They treat us swell here! We have good eats and go to a show and a boxing match once a week. There is no individualism, we go everywhere in a marching group. Our left feet all hit the deck together. I was picked as the honor man in our platoon and sure was proud as it was a sure surprise. I received a certificate from Col. Cox and saluted him. It was quite a new experience. I am automatically a PFC but please don't address my letters that way, as I will get on the shit list. I won't be a PFC officially until I get out of boot camp. Hope this finds you all well and happy! Your loving son, Merrill.

MAIL CALL

This letter was received from **Arthur W. Rodriquez** dated 8/10/2009.

Hi Orvel,

I received your letter some time ago, but because I do things very slowly these days. It has something to do with age, "I think." I appreciate your concern about my need of a typewriter. It's no longer a problem but I have put my story on hold for now.

I am enclosing my DESIGN CONCEPT I have named HARNESSING THE OCEAN. It is a very important concept and because I don't the money or years left in my life that I decided to have it PUBLISHED. This way it is now covered by PUBLIC DOMAIN. This way someone will make use of it. "I hope!" It is now in the Internet under [KERN RIVER COURIER.COM](http://KERNRIVERCOURIER.COM).

I like "Rod" instead of Art. Thanks for the birthday greeting. Rod -SORRY I WON'T BE ABLE TO MAKE THE REUNION.

Editor's comment: Rod enclosed a full page ad from the KERN RIVER COURIER, a local newspaper date of publication, Friday August 7, 2009. As he said in his letter its title is Harnessing the Ocean and it is basically Hydraulic Energy Conversion System along with the Hydraulic Mechanical Equipment needed to make it work. Rod began this project before 1959 because the first concept was dated 1959 and its revised date is August 7, 2009. This is a new energy production concept that Rod has devoted 50 years of research and planning. He has 2 architectural scaled drawings of the equipment involved in his design and 2 artists rendering of what it will look like. His list of how it works: Ocean current and wave action is funneled through a narrow channel that deepens the volume and pressure of ocean water entering the narrowed opening rises with an explosive upward thrust. This lifts a float upward and the energy from this action is equal to the kinetic energy when the float comes down, "as per Newton's 3rd law of motion." This energy transferred from the flywheel pushes rods connected to the piston compressing the liquid into hydraulic energy, which when transferred through a large cylinder. The hydraulic kinetic energy operates a hydraulic motor that powers a generator producing electrical power. The concept that Rod describes is outside of my talents but his theory seems to make sense to me. There is no way his full page ad could be published in this newsletter but to those of you that would like to see what Rod has designed, I suggest you go on the Internet to KERNRIVERCOURIER.COM to see it. Amazing!

Help Wanted

Larry Anderson, the son of one of C123rd's own, GEORGE L ANDERSON, wants desperately to secure a Red Book for his dad, who is 91 years of age. The Red Book was compiled at Camp Pendleton in late 1943. It is the photo directory of the original members of the 23rd Regiment, before the division sailed from USA soil in January 1944. If anyone knows where a copy of this important, long out of print book may be secured by Larry for his dad, George, please contact me, the editor of *CLOSE RANKS* or George by phone or letter at his home. His address is: **George L. Anderson, 14 S. 59th Street W., Duluth, MN 55807-2461. Phone (218) 624 5676.**

Mail Call

From Mrs. **June Oister**, dated August 31, 2009.

Dear Orvel,

What a joy to read your latest *CLOSE RANKS* (C123RD). I spent last evening with my dear friends, Lisa and Robert Knapp. He is a retired Air Force veteran and teaches at Maxwell, here in Montgomery. They have both been there for Clarence and for me these past 3 years as Clarence's health was failing. I am sending a photo I took in front of home after Clarence erected this flag pole on Dec 7, 2000, (59th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Attack by Japan,) and OLD GLORY has been flying every day and night since and will continue to fly until I get moved, then lowered and taken to my new residence and it will fly there. Do hope your health is good. We all need your talent and commitment to those who have given so much and to those who have given life itself. Thank you and all those whose memories we cherish. Take care and enjoy your reunion. Semper Fi June Oister



On the back of the flag photo June wrote:

“Flag Pole set by Clarence Oister Sr. Dec. 7, 2000. Photo by June Oister.

To Orvel Johnson, a proud Marine still serving the United States of America. God Bless the 4th Marine Division and all their loved ones! Semper Fi! June Oister”

Another Mail Call

A month or more ago I received an E-mail from David Hogan. I don't think he told me how he located me all the way up here in Minnesota. (We have about six inches of snow on the ground after yesterday's winter weather warnings and very cold temperature during the night.) Dave inquired about Claude Robert Stafford, asking if anyone in C123rd knew him, that he'd been a Marine in WWII and was killed in combat in 1944. I have researched our company's roster in the 23rd Regiment photo directory made in 1943 before the 4th Marine Division was deployed and found Claude's name and picture. I have contacted David and told him Claude was in C123rd and I remember him as a good guy, a good Marine and he was killed in action on Saipan but I did not know the particulars concerning his death. To attempt I would place his inquiry in our next newsletter asking the C123rd survivors to share what information they might have with Dave. Dave informed me that Claude was his uncle, his mother's brother and that David was named after his uncle Claude. His name is Claude David Hogan. (He dropped the e for a modern spelling) Claude's picture from the 23rd Regiment "Red Book" is included in this 4th quarter issue. So if any member of C123rd knew Claude Stafford. Contact David direct or through me the editor of *CLOSE RANKS*. Dave's address is: **David Hogan, 3830 Clearwater Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28311**. E-mail is: hogand10@yahoo.com

CARRY OVER FROM THE LAST ISSUE

We need to follow up on the wedding announcement that was published in the 3rd quarter issue of *CLOSE RANKS*. You may recall that Raymond Secules told us of his wedding and where he now lives but he never told us the name of his bride. What do you say about each of us sending Ray and his bride a Wedding Congratulations card? Send it to:

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Secules, 19 Valley Heights Dr., Williamsport, PA 17701-1922

It will be helpful to have her name on record so please tell us. Send it to the editor and it will appear in our C123rd roster and in the 1st Quarter 2010 issue of *CLOSE RANKS*.

4th Marine Division 62nd Annual Reunion Report

Following is the report furnished me by Dale Cook, the reunion Chairman. He did a great write-up that is better than any I could make so here is his report for those who did not attend will read about what they missed and to refresh the memory for those who were there.

Behind the Scenes at *Circus Circus*, Reno:

Greetings on behalf of your Reunion host, Ray Marine, Chapter 31. We want to say “Thank You” to the scores of fellow 4th Marine Division Marines and their families who made the Associations 62nd Reunion at *Circus Circus Reno* a wonderful success. We may be aging a bit as the years pass but we know how to have a good party, especially in the company of fellow Leathernecks with whom we shared foxholes and those times we put our lives on the line.

There are not so many of us now but quality has not diminished with the passing of time and as always surpassed quantity - a lesson we learned as “boot” and today once again as our speaker Recruiting Command Col. Rodman Sansone told us at the Grand Banquet is guiding the selection of young men to fulfill the Corps ranks.

The Association presently has 1,638 life members, 604 annual members, and 517 widows. Total Marine registration numbered about 100, family and guests added 130 persons. Purposely, due to member or spouse disabilities and deaths, our planning was quite conservative: we'd bite the bullet with maybe 150 persons. Instead we experienced a surge in August bringing our room night total to 604, about 2/3rds of that at Fredericksburg. This reality forced last minute change of usable activity space, causing a bit of confusion at first.

As a tribute to you and your families, we engaged Tom Graves, a professional photographer to cover our reunion and make a photographic memento. Tom is a member of the Joe Rosenthal Chapter of the USMC Combat Correspondents in the San Francisco Bay Area.

We were proud of our opening night greeting event, the Maui Luau, and the respective favorable of the 128 persons attending. It was truly a success. The Mandalay Ballroom décor and tables reflected the island we all knew so well. Patrons were provided shell leis from Wailuku and the dozen Chapter Greeters wore fresh orchid leis.

The *Circus Circus* evening's buffet menu was truly Hawaiian. The Chef added a typical luau touch, a roasted pig as the centerpiece of the buffet a spread of 24 menu choices. A wide range of deserts proved tempting and sinful. Tom Aquila's Hoaloha band throughout the feast provided a background of island music and later musically supported the Pua Ala dancer' program.

The reunion program was varied and included (1) the bus and train ride to the famed gold mining area of Virginia City, (2) the formal Memorial Service honoring our fallen brother Marines and recent Association members' death; (3) the outstanding 42nd Street stage show; (4) the ladies Breakfast with Miss Nevada and our; (5) Grand Banquet and the installation of Vern Brintzenhofe as 2009-2010 President.

Ralph Slaughter won the *Circus Circus Reno's* free room night gift. John Siegreto and Clayton Chipman were the 50/50 winners, receiving a \$ 266.00 dollar check each. The collection grossed \$ 1,132.00.

Behind the scenes your committee workers included Joe Epperson and Robert Carter who handled the registration, (Steve Kupina provided the Chapter a free bottle of Central California fine wine for each registrant.) Fran McCreary and Barbara Fanslow Chaired the Ladies Breakfast; Ole's Bar was under the stewardship of Tom McCreary; dispensing 17 cases of beer and 12 cases of soft drinks; Andy and Ethel Parodi handled the drawing. Assisting throughout were George Fanslow, Mary Cook, Andrea Tallman and Annette English.

Fourth Division Challenge Coins are available at \$ 12.00 each from Linda Earle, 308 Dunn Rd, Norway, ME 04268-4010. A Limited number Reunion Scarlet "4" Caps (covers) Available \$ 15.00 each prepaid mail from Dale Cook , 1691 Jubilee Dr, Brentwood CA 94513.

Semper Fi

/s/ PNP Dale J. Cook, Reunion Chairman

P.S. Houston Texas was chosen for the site of our 63rd Annual Reunion in 2010.

(Reunion Footnote) Memorial Service Program

The Memorial Service was held in the Mandalay Ballroom and was very well attended.

I don't think there were any empty seats. And as usual it was conducted in a most reverent and respectful air. A Marine Honor Guard posted the flag. All in attendance joined in singing our National Anthem and proclaimed The Pledge of Allegiance.

The Association President, Vern Brintzenhofe, then welcomed all and gave a brief review of the accomplishments of the 4th Marine Division in bringing WWII to an end without any more to die in the process. He also listed the numbers in each campaign of those who were killed in action and separately those who died of wounds. I had not seen this detail before.

Combat Operations	KIA	DOW
Roi-Namur	172	18
Saipan	941	135
Tinian	199	27
Iwo Jima	<u>1,462</u>	<u>344</u>
	2,674	+ 524 = 3,198

The Final Muster of those who died since our 61st reunion was read from the list in Service Program which numbered 140 and an additional list of about 6 names that were reported after the program was printed. The Memorial address was given by "Iron Mike", Michael Mervosh, Sgt. Maj. USMC, (ret.) The Memorial Service ended with singing of the Marine Corps Hymn and with the playing of *Taps* by LCpl Kevin Wiggen, Marine Honor Guard Bugler.

A note from Joline: Hello everyone. My family wishes to thank you all for the cards you sent when my Dad, John Seymour passed last November. I do wish I could have seen you all at the reunion. Our finances wouldn't allow it. Because of the generosity of friends, though, we did take a trip in October for our 25th anniversary – the first real vacation we've ever had. We took a scenic driving tour to the Gaspé Peninsula in Ontario, CN. The beauty of God's nature is incredible! Enclosed is a copy of the latest C-1-23rd roster. Please let us know if you have any changes or corrections. Have a Happy New Year everyone! Hope to see you next year.

DEAR FRIENDS,

To those who have made CLOSE RANKS the success that several have expressed, THANKS for your blessings participation and contributions of news and stories from your lives to unite us further than our Titles US Marines. This completes Volume 1 for 2009. I have enjoyed bringing it to you with the wonderful support, skill and dedication of Joline Doersam and Sherrie Ferguson, without whose help it could not have been done.

Your editor is looking forward to receiving the individual life histories and or specific memories stored by 30 some C123rd members who have yet to tell theirs in the upcoming pages in Volume II - 2010. Each Marine has individual experiences of living history of WW2 that are different in many ways from any other. Your families and friends want to know and will tell you they are thankful of what and how you served in the history of C123rd in WW2.

Please have a Merry CHRISTmas, good health and happy times with loved ones in 2010. -Orv