



Moderately



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# RECALL

The North Carolina Military Historical Society



VOLUME XV

FALL 2009

ISSUE 2

## The Year the American Revolution Should Have Ended

By James Cheatham

By the end of 1775, England's thirteen American Colonies were in a state of unofficial revolt. The English Parliament had, in an effort to appease its American subjects, repealed the Stamp Act; however, following the Boston Tea Party in December, 1773, it had passed a series of Intolerable Acts.

In June 1775, the rebels, although losing in the Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston, had inflicted heavy casualties. Thomas Jefferson—one of the Virginia gentry like Washington—had just arrived in Philadelphia as a Virginia delegate to the Second Continental Congress. He wrote, pretty cheerfully, that “although war would be expensive,” nevertheless, after Bunker Hill, “nobody now entertains a doubt but that we are able to cope with the whole force of Great Britain, if we are but willing to exert ourselves.”

Parliament resolved that there should be no more kid glove treatment: “it is said, the same force will be employed, as if the inhabitants were French or Spanish enemies.”

King George III had no intention of reconciliation and, on 23 August 1775, issued the following proclamation: *that many of our subjects in diverse parts of our Colonies and Plantations in North America, misled by dangerous and ill designing men ... have at length proceeded to open and avowed rebellion, by arraying themselves in a hostile manner ... and traitorously preparing, ordering and levying war against us we have thought fit ... to issue our Royal Proclamation, hereby declaring, that not only all our Officers, civil and military, are obliged to exert their utmost endeavors to suppress such rebellion, and to bring the traitors to justice.*

Representatives in Parliament who opposed such action, including even some military officers, now realized the enormity of fighting a war with America, 3000 miles from England and

whose colonies spread 1200 miles along its coastline.

With no means to communicate except with large, cumbersome sailing ships, the English were at a distinct disadvantage. For example, a request for a change in tactics could take two months to cross the Atlantic. A reply drafted by the King and his council could take a month. Thus by the time the English general or admiral in the Colonies received his instructions, five months might have passed.

Despite the geographical problems and Whig opposition in Parliament, King George was determined to put down the American rebels at all costs. In order to keep English troops in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean and beef up his American Army, the King turned to foreign mercenaries from Germany.

The idea that the King of England would recruit foreigners—and for hire—to hunt down and kill his own

subjects struck Americans, then and now, as one of the most horrific examples of cheap despotism that George III could have offered.

Between August 1775 and February 1776, some 18,000 German troops referred to as “Hessians” were signed up for the British cause.

The following six events, when added to the problem of the great distances to overcome, give support to the proposition that the King and rational men in the English government should have seen that the American War for Independence was, for all intents and purposes, over after 1776.

### FIRST: THOMAS PAINE'S TRACT - COMMON SENSE

One hope the English had at the beginning of 1776 was that among a large number of farmers, plantation owners, and merchants there were loyalists to the Crown who could offer its subjects trade for their goods, protection from foreign adversaries.

**“He that rebels against reason is a real rebel, but he that in defense of reason rebels against tyranny has a better title to Defender of the Faith than George the Third.”**  
—Thomas Paine

and an orderly form of government.

North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin had been driven out of his Palace in New Bern by the rebels "Committee of Safety" and forced to take refuge on a British warship anchored in the Cape Fear River near Wilmington. He was one of those who believed the loyalists in the Colonies could be rallied to support the King. He wrote King George III in 1775 and strongly recommended a southern strategy that would call on these loyalists to fight the rebels.

In 1774, Thomas Paine, an English subject who had failed at several endeavors, sailed for America. He had a letter of introduction from none other than Benjamin Franklin, the Colonies' agent in London. Settling in Philadelphia, on 10 January 1776, Paine published a pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. Drawing on ideas espoused by John Locke, he stated, "'Mankind was originally equal in the order of creation and monarchy' was an unhappy historical accident, and it had laid the whole world in blood and ashes.

"Who is America's King? I'll tell you, friends, he reigns above; and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Great Britain." The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth than American Independence.

Paine's 77-page pamphlet sold 500,000 copies that made it the Colonies' best seller until 1852 when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published. *Common Sense* stirred the hearts of Americans for Independence. It was read at every place of public resort.

George Washington wrote to Joseph Reed on 1 April 1776, that "*Common Sense* is working powerful change ... in the minds of many men."

Thanks to a lowly British subject who had immigrated to America, the tide had turned.

## SECOND: 27 FEBRUARY 1776—

### THE BATTLE OF MOORES CREEK BRIDGE

Still believing there were loyalists, particularly in the south, King George and his military advisors developed a Southern Strategy which they thought could rally many subjects to the battle against the rebels.

Living near Cross Creek, N.C., (now Fayetteville) were many Scottish settlers who had been given land grants for pledging allegiance to England. Under the leadership of aged Scottish warrior, Donald McDonald, over 1500 loyalists were organized to march to Wilmington, where they would be integrated into British forces.

The American rebels, under command of Colonel James Moore, were determined to block their journey. Various routes were available along the Cape Fear River and its tributaries. Finally, in late February, the rebels learned of the loyalists intended crossing of Moores Creek, a small stream on the property of the widow Moore about 10 miles north of Wilmington. Here militia Colonels Caswell and Lillington set up an ambush.

During the day of 26 February, Lillington set up defenses, including two cannon, on the south side of the creek, and Caswell camped on the north side. During the night Caswell moved his

men to the south side and removed the planks on the small bridge crossing Moores Creek.

In the early morning fog, the Scots approached the bridge suspecting some type of opposition. Not knowing who was there and seeing that the planks had been removed, they called out in Gaelic, "Who goes there?" When no response was given, they knew they had a fight.

In true Scottish tradition, about 50 men drew swords and stormed upon the bridge using their swords to walk the timbers. They were shouting battle cries for King George and blowing their bagpipes.

When some reached the other side, they not only were met by musket fire, but another surprise, cannon fire.

Over 50 loyalists were killed or drowned and 1,400 captured in what the North Carolinians later called the first victory of the war. No loyalists reached Wilmington, and the first act of British Southern Strategy had failed.

## THIRD: MARCH 17, 1776— BOSTON EVACUATED

George Washington had appointed Philip Schuyler to create a "Northern Department" to add Canada to the rebelling colonies. He intended to protect his northern flank.

Benedict Arnold had, in 1775, captured Fort Ticonderoga and wanted to capture Montreal and Quebec. When these efforts failed, Washington asked his newly appointed artillery general, Henry Knox, to bring much needed cannon from Fort Ticonderoga to his siege of Boston. Knox was formerly a Boston bookseller, but he had quickly learned the art of cannon warfare and remained throughout the war as one of Washington's closest aides.

Miraculously, Knox, using strong sleds, hauled 52 cannon along with 9 large mortars and 2 howitzers through the snow and ice to Cambridge, Massachusetts, by the end of January 1776. Washington, by then, knew that General William Howe and the British intended to evacuate Boston in the spring when thaws would permit ships to move in Massachusetts Bay. By early March, Washington had over 1,000 laborers preparing defenses on Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston with the intent to use Knox's artillery on the enemy.

General Howe decided against a fight for the Heights and on 17 March 1776, evacuated 9,000 British soldiers, their dependents, and over 1,000 loyalists.

General Washington correctly surmised that the British would move to New York where better sea approaches would enable them to defend Manhattan and strike out at Washington's Army. He began moving his main army south.

On 31 March 1776, George Washington wrote his brother John the following letter:

*We have maintained our ground against the enemy ... disbanded one army [militia regiments around Boston] and recruited another [Continental army] within musket-shot of two-and-twenty regiments, the flower of the British army ... and, at last,*



Lexington Minuteman

*have beaten them into a shameful and precipitate retreat out of a place the strongest by nature on this continent.*

#### **FOURTH: JUNE 28, 1776—**

##### **BRITISH FAIL TO TAKE CHARLESTON**

British General Henry Clinton should have realized after no loyalists showed up at Wilmington that this so-called “Southern Strategy” wasn't working. However, he let South Carolina's royal governor-in-exile, Lord William Campbell, convince him that the port of Charleston could easily be taken.

Washington had earlier sent his second-in-command, Major General Charles Lee, to Charleston to set up defenses. Lee had set up a small fort on Sullivan's Island on the north tip of the harbor. Here the rebel militia under its commander, William Moultrie, was able to bombard the British Fleet as it approached.

Moultrie's militiamen proved to be better than General Lee could have anticipated. Henry Clinton still sent General Cornwallis's forces ashore on the end of Sullivan's Island opposite the rebel fort; however, his intelligence failed to advise him that an 8-10 foot deep canal separated that part of the island. Cornwallis's men could not withstand the militia's musket fire from the other side and were forced to retire. Clinton's ships, after several weeks, gave up and sailed north.

#### **FIFTH: JULY 4TH—**

##### **DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

Meanwhile dissent in the English Parliament for continuing the war was building. James Earl Fox and Edmund Burke joined John Locke and other Whigs in vocal opposition. Fox wrote:

*I'll never vote for taxes for so ignoble purpose as carrying on a war commenced unjustly and supported with no other view than to the extirpation of freedom.*

In May 1776, the King reluctantly authorized a peace proposal to be presented by the Howe brothers. This would pardon “all acting under the authority of any rebel Congress or Convention” and also would “promise to remove all internal taxation of the colonies.” Also it would “allow the colonies, still under British rule, to fund their defenses for themselves through their own legislatures.”

Unfortunately, by the time this proposal was presented to General Washington by the Howe brothers on 20 July 1776, there was no way a reconciliation could be obtained which would keep the Colonies under Great Britain.

On 7 June 1776, the events of: (1) Publication of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* pamphlet, (2) the Moores Creek Victory, (3) the evacuation of Boston by the British, and (4) the failure of the British to take Charleston, all prompted Virginia's Richard Henry Lee to offer an independence resolution to the Continental Congress.

A committee of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson was appointed to write a Declaration. We all know Jefferson did most of the writing and on 4 July 1776, after days of debate and revisions, a Declaration of Independence was formally adopted.

#### **SIXTH: DECEMBER 26, 1776—**

##### **WASHINGTON'S SURPRISE ATTACK ON TRENTON, NEW JERSEY**

In September 1776, Washington and the Continental Congress agreed that New York, then occupied by the British,

was not likely to be overrun, and Washington, with most of his Army's one year enlistments about to expire, and with Howe pressing, retreated through New Jersey and crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Here he intended to camp for the winter.

General Howe announced on 13 December that he was keeping his forces in New Jersey for the winter. Shortly thereafter Thomas Paine, who was traveling with Washington's army on its retreat through New Jersey, published another pamphlet, *The American Crisis*. He extolled his countrymen to be calm and loyal to the cause. The retreat, he explained, was orderly and would allow Washington to regroup, refit, and to get rearmed. This pamphlet circulated through the army and the Colonies and kept the Colonies focused on wearing the British down.

Howe posted three brigades, two Hessian mercenaries and one British, along the Jersey side of the Delaware River to keep an eye on Washington's movements. Howe returned to winter in New York City.

The Hessian Brigade at Trenton was under command of Johann Von Rall who was kept busy by rebel snipers of New Jersey militiamen. Late on Christmas Day a winter storm hit the area. Von Rail concluded that no fool would venture out in this severe weather.

How wrong he was. Washington had been planning a surprise attack and on a Christmas night in sleet and snow he crossed the Delaware, now clogged with ice, at McConkey's Ferry. He positioned a division under General John Sullivan on the southwest edge of Trenton and General Nathanael Greene, accompanied by Washington himself, on the northwest side of Trenton. He also had nine 12 pounder artillery pieces.

About 7:30 a.m. on 26 December, in sleet and snow, Washington began his attack on Trenton. The Hessians were literally caught “with their pants down.” In close hand-to-hand combat they were overwhelmed. Von Rall attempted a counterattack but was himself killed.

Washington had two dead and two wounded. Of the Hessians 1,000-man force, 25 were killed and over 900 taken prisoner. Also large amounts of weapons, ammunition, and supplies were seized.

Panic spread through the rest of New Jersey as the British awaited Washington's next move.

This victory at Trenton on 26 December 1776 ended the year with the American Army on the initiative for American Independence. This supported the proposition that the year 1776 was the year that Great Britain and especially King George III should have realized their American Colonies were not there for “the taking” and sued for peace. Instead the King insisted on subjecting both his army and the Colonies to a bloody and unnecessary war for five more years.

The liberties of our country are worth defending at all hazards. We have received them from our worthy ancestors: They purchased them for us with toil, treasure, and blood. It will bring an everlasting infamy on the present generation, enlightened as it is, if we should suffer them to be wrestled from us... or be cheated out of them by the artifices of false and designing men.—SAMUEL ADAMS, 1771

# Tar Heels Fought with Custer at the Little Big Horn

By LTC (Ret.) Sion H. Harrington III



Regimental guidon of the 7th Cavalry, which stayed with the pack train during the battle.

25 June 1876 is one of the least known dates of one of the best known events in American history. On that day, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, a daring and some say reckless cavalry officer with probable political ambitions, led the men of his famed 7th Regiment, United

States Cavalry, into one of the most famous or infamous, depending on one's perspective, engagements of all time. His campaign to defeat the alliance of American Indians, primarily Sioux and Cheyenne, under Sitting Bull culminated in the Battle of the Little Big Horn on 25-26 June 1876, where several companies of the 7th Cavalry were completely wiped out in a fight against overwhelming odds.

Throughout the long history of the United States, many battles and wars have been fought between the American Indians and the steadily encroaching whites and blacks who sought to settle the West or pan for gold. But no other battle between these forces either before or after the War Between the States has captured and held the American psyche as thoroughly as that of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The event spawned a plethora of books, plays, art, movies, living history re-creations, and tourism opportunities far beyond what any of the original participants on either side could have ever imagined that continues to this day.

Contrary to popular belief and despite the "Hollywood" interpretation of history as portrayed on the silver screen, not all members of the 7th Cavalry "died with their boots on," to borrow from a popular old Western movie. Custer actually had only a portion of the regiment under his direct command on that fateful day, five of the twelve troops. Custer's cavalry regiment was the vanguard of a much larger force under General Alfred Terry that was headed for the vicinity of the Little Big Horn to destroy or scatter a reportedly large concentration of hostile Indians.

Custer's strategy for scouting ahead and, he hoped, eliminating the Indian threat himself called for courage and the ability to cover a large area quickly. By doing this he hoped to pinpoint the location of the Indians and then launch a decisive surprise attack. In order to accomplish this, he divided his already under-strength regiment of 547 troopers into three squadrons. Under his personal command were Troops C, E, F, I, and L. Major Marcus A. Reno commanded Troops A, G, and M, plus about 35 Arikara Indian scouts, while Troops D, H, and K rode with the regiment's

senior captain, Frederick W. Benteen. Troop B, reinforced with six men from each of the other eleven troops, comprised the supply, or pack, train guard under Captain Thomas M. McDougall.

"General" Custer, as many still referred to him, served with distinction as a

Federal cavalry officer during the War Between the States commanding the Michigan Cavalry Brigade. Under his command, the "Wolverines" of the 1st, 5th, 6th, and 7th Michigan Cavalry regiments made a name for themselves in the Army of the Potomac fighting against the likes of such famous Confederate cavalry leaders as JEB Stuart and Wade Hampton.

Like many career Army officers after the end of the war, Custer was required to revert to his permanent rank. For the dashing young cavalry commander this meant a "bust" to lieutenant colonel. Post-war assignments were not as exciting as leading a brigade of well-armed and well-trained cavalymen in battle against Southern cavalymen. The continued expansion west of the American populace inevitably spelled trouble with the native peoples of the western states and territories. The challenge of securing the western lands was a tremendous challenge for the under-manned and relatively poorly trained, equipped, and armed soldiers of the post-war United States Army.

By 1876, George Armstrong Custer found himself in command of the United States Army's 7th Cavalry assigned to Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory [now North Dakota]. The 7th's mission was a tough one. It was their task to provide protection to settlers and travelers over a large area of responsibility. Resources were few and problems many. Their mission was not made any easier when, after completing an earlier mission ostensibly to identify flora and fauna of the area, Colonel Custer enthusiastically reported to higher command that there was gold in the Dakota Territory's Black Hills region. At that time, the Black Hills were sacred to Indians and off limits to all but the native peoples themselves. Any incursions were sure to bring trouble. Once word leaked out, the race was on. In addition to the ever-growing numbers of settlers coming to and passing through the area, hordes of adventurous men seeking to strike it rich quickly flooded into the off-limits Black Hills area to pan for the newly discovered gold. The stage was set for a great deal of bloodshed.

By the spring of 1876, several tribes of Native Americans had already joined forces under a charismatic Hunkpapa Lakota



The crossed sabers and numeral of the 7th Cavalry.



From [www.sonsofthesouth.net](http://www.sonsofthesouth.net)  
Custer as Lieutenant Colonel, circa 1876



From [romanchristendom.blogspot.com](http://romanchristendom.blogspot.com)  
Custer in his flamboyant 1860s uniform as a Bevet Major Cavalry General.

Sioux holy man named Sitting Bull in an effort to expel the invaders from their lands. Their armed efforts came to be known in history as The Great Sioux War of 1876-77.

In his pre-campaign planning, Custer made the decision not to bring along any Gatling guns. The early wheel-mounted version of the machine gun, invented by North Carolinian Dr. Richard Gatling, could have provided a massive amount of rapid fire during what deteriorated into a life or death defensive struggle rather than the glorious offensive action Custer envisioned. Custer reasoned that the guns would only impede the speed of march of his mounted troopers. In retrospect, choosing not to take advantage of the tremendous firepower of the Gatling guns available at Fort Abraham Lincoln was a fatal mistake!

But, having said all this, my purpose is not to psychoanalyze George Armstrong Custer, nor to conduct a scholarly critical analysis of his strategy and tactics. Nor is it simply to provide an account of the events leading up to the great battle of 25 June. My purpose is to acquaint the reader with the North Carolina connection to this famous event. Several men from North Carolina took part in this epic struggle, and one was killed fighting with Custer's group.

We have identified four Tar Heels among the men of Custer's command, but it is entirely conceivable that the names of all the men born or reared in North Carolina who played a role in the Battle of the Little Big Horn are not yet known. Although much research has been undertaken about the battle and Custer's Command, to this writer's knowledge, there has been no truly in-depth sociological study of the soldiers who served with Custer that would provide the type of detailed genealogical background information necessary to conclusively and accurately determine each man's full story and origin. Information on participants has come from a wide variety of scattered sources, and covers the spectrum from eyewitness, first-hand reports to family lore and the purely anecdotal. Fortunately, information has surfaced regarding three

North Carolinians who took part in the battle.

Four native North Carolinians are found on the rolls of the 7th Cavalry at the time of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, but only three were present for the battle itself. Perhaps the luckiest of the four was three-year Army veteran Harvey A. Fox, a Private in Troop D. A native of Alexander County, North Carolina, Fox was on detached duty and not riding with the regiment during the fateful month of June 1876. Indian wars notwithstanding, Harvey Fox must have liked what he saw during his service out west for he apparently settled there, dying in Montana in 1913.

Private Johnathan Robers was born in 1851 in Surry County, North Carolina. A farrier by trade, Robers enlisted as a Private in the Army on 4 December 1872 and served as a member of Troop K. During the battle he served with the pack train guard and was involved in the hilltop fight of 25-26 June 1876, with Major Reno's command.

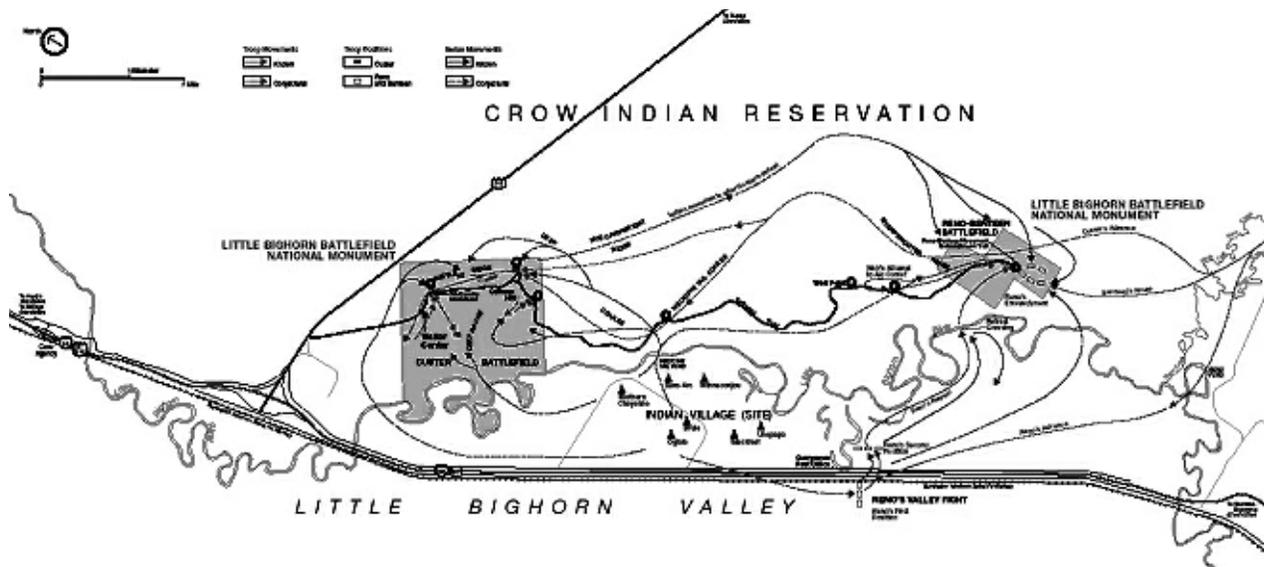
Trooper John Thadus was a 21-year-old farmer when he enlisted in Baltimore, Maryland, in Troop C of the 7th Cavalry on 17 August 1875. On his enlistment record, Thadus is described as standing five feet seven inches tall with dark eyes, dark hair, and a dark complexion. Chief Historian at the Little Big Horn Battlefield John A. Doerner's research reveals that Thadus rode a light sorrel horse and wore a white hat during the battle. He died far from his native Guilford County, North Carolina, home

on 25 June 1876, along with 209 other soldiers and civilians while fighting on the hill occupied by Custer and his five troop detachment. He is buried on "Last Stand Hill."

One of North Carolina's most interesting survivors of the Battle of the Little Big Horn was Sergeant Daniel Alexander Kanipe. Kanipe was born near Marion, McDowell County, North Carolina, on 15 April 1853, where he resided as a farmer until enlisting in Troop C, 7th Cavalry on 7 August 1872. Kanipe served in the troop commanded by Colonel Custer's own brother, Captain Thomas Custer. The description on his enlistment form lists him as having hazel eyes, a fair complexion, light hair,



From en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitting\_Bull  
Chief Sitting Bull, Sioux leader who led forces against Custer in 1876.



Battle of Little Big Horn

Map from [www.friendslittlebighorn.com/custerlaststand.htm](http://www.friendslittlebighorn.com/custerlaststand.htm)

and standing five feet eleven inches tall, a relatively tall man for his time. To Kanipe goes the distinction of carrying the next-to-last message from Custer's command on 25 June 1876. An Italian immigrant, Trumpeter Giovanni Martini (a.k.a. John Martin) is credited with being the last man to leave Custer's command before it succumbed to overwhelming odds. Like Kanipe, he was sent to bring help. Unknown to Custer, neither Reno nor Benteen could fight their way through the swarming sea of Indians to bring the relief he and his beleaguered men so badly needed.

After delivering the message to Captain McDougall, Kanipe continued on to Captain Benteen, as instructed, with whose command he remained for the duration of the battle. In a 1924 interview for a Greensboro newspaper, Kanipe credited the poor condition of a sergeant's horse with saving his life. It seems he had been riding along with a sergeant whose job it would have been to carry the next message. That man's horse gave out, and he had to fall back, which put Kanipe handy to act as messenger. He told the reporter that had it not been for that man's weak horse, he likely would not have survived the battle.

The circa 1918 image of Daniel A. Kanipe is found on the back cover of a North Carolina World War I brochure appealing for support with war bond sales, and is located in the Military Collection of the State Archives of North Carolina. The crafters of the brochure no doubt sought to capitalize on Kanipe's claimed unique status and the notoriety of "Custer's Last Stand." Former Corporal Kanipe is shown as a captain in the uniform of the North Carolina Reserve Militia, an organization formed in 1917 to fill the gap left by the federalization and subsequent deployment out of the state of the North Carolina National Guard.



Captain Daniel A. Kanipe



From [mohicanpress.com/battles/ba04004](http://mohicanpress.com/battles/ba04004)

Sergeant Daniel A. Kanipe, of McDowell County, N.C., a trooper in Troop C, 7th Regiment, U.S. Cavalry, shown wearing a Corporal's uniform in a photograph possibly taken shortly before the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Knowing that a much stronger Army column was drawing near, the Indians broke camp and left the area on 26 June. On the 27th Kanipe and the men under Reno and Benteen were relieved. Sergeant Kanipe left a fascinating account of what he saw during that momentous June of 1876. His account can be accessed on the web at [mohicanpress.com/battles/ba04004](http://mohicanpress.com/battles/ba04004).

Kanipe's First Sergeant, Edwin Bobo of Ohio, was killed in action during the battle leaving a widow and two small boys. On 12 April 1877, Daniel Kanipe married Bobo's widow, Missouri Anne Wyskoff, a native of Burke County, North Carolina.

After remaining in the Army for another year, Kanipe received his discharge at Fort Totten, Dakota Territory, on 7 August 1877, after which he and his family came home to McDowell County, North Carolina. He lived on a farm south

of Marion and was an active Mason, serving as treasurer for Mystic Tie Lodge #237 out of Marion for over 20 years. A faith-

ful Presbyterian, Kanipe remained a patriot well into old age. During World War I he served as captain of the local company of the North Carolina Reserve Militia, an organization created to fill the void left by the federalization and subsequent deployment of the North Carolina National Guard. He died at his home on 18 July 1926 at the age of 73.

The results of the Battle of the Little Big Horn flashed across the country. News of the massacre reached the eastern states some days later and there was universal shock and disbelief.

Tom Belton, Curator of Military History for the North Carolina Museum of History, observed that the nation was in a festive mood at the time. We were in the midst of celebrating the centennial of our nation. All were busily and proudly celebrating our national birthday and the country's great achievements over our century of existence when news of the disaster at the Battle of the Little Big Horn arrived. Though it did not stop the celebration, it did cast a pall over the festivities and give our citizens pause to stop and think about the situation in the West, and what it might portend for the future.

The aura created around Colonel George Armstrong Custer, the 7th Cavalry, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Big Horn are all shared in some small way by us all. And, a full measure belongs to five North Carolinians: one who gave his life in the battle; two who participated and lived to tell it; one who was spared by the hand of fate; and a fifth man, a physician and inventor, whose martial creation could possibly have turned the tide in Custer's favor had the Colonel not chosen more wisely.

## A Soldier

I was that which others did not want to be.  
 I went where others feared to go,  
 And did what others feared to do.  
 I asked nothing from those who gave nothing,  
 And reluctantly accepted the thought  
 Of eternal loneliness ...  
 Should I fail.  
 I have seen the face of terror,  
 Felt the stinging cold of fear,  
 And enjoyed the sweet taste  
 Of a moment's love.  
 I have cried, pained, and hoped ...  
 But most of all, I have lived times  
 Others would say were best forgotten.  
 At least someday I will be able to say  
 That I was proud of what I was ...  
 A soldier.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

# Helping Win the War

Valiant duty at the Norfolk Navy Yard helped the U.S. win on both sides of the world

By Kenneth R. Samuelson

## George E. Zeigler

*Branch of Service:* United States Navy Reserve

*Highest rank attained in service:* Lieutenant Commander

*Dates of Service:* 5/26/1941 - 12/9/1946

During WWII he primarily served at the Maryland Dry Dock Company, Baltimore. Critical to the success of any military campaign are those who supply the resources necessary to wage war. George Zeigler was a US Navy officer during World War II who helped earn the Allied victory by building ships that carried men and material to combat zones around the world.

Zeigler was born in Thomasville, Georgia, but moved to Columbus, Georgia, at the age of 14. After graduating from Columbus High School, he received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy. A failed eye examination prevented his admission to the Academy, so Zeigler applied to Georgia Tech where he earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering 9 June 1941.

During his senior year at Tech, he learned that the U.S. Navy was seeking engineers. Zeigler fulfilled his long held interest in the Navy by applying for a commission. He received his commission 1 July 1941, just two weeks after graduating from Georgia Tech. Conveniently, Zeigler's first two months of duty were at Georgia Tech where he received his uniforms as well as indoctrination into the Navy. At the end of two months, the officer engineers were divided into three groups for further assignment. The men in Zeigler's group were sent to various navy yards to be involved in ship construction.

On 3 September 1941, Zeigler reported for duty at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth Virginia, assigned to the Construction Department. It was an exciting time for this new Ensign in the Navy Engineering Corps. The battleship *USS Alabama* was just being completed, and Zeigler eagerly explored every part of her. Although the United States was at peace, the Norfolk shipyard was on a wartime basis with tight security. Europe was at war, and this was clear to Zeigler as he witnessed the repair work being done to the battle-damaged British aircraft carrier *HMS Illustrious* at the Norfolk Navy Yard.

On 7 December 1941, Zeigler was at the movies. In the lobby he heard a sailor shouting and swearing about the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Most patrons of the theater thought the sailor was drunk, but, of course, found out rather quickly the news was accurate. Zeigler got into uniform and immediately went to the shipyard. He got no other information except that the attack reports were true. On Monday 8 December, the U.S.A. was officially at war.

On 8 December Zeigler was named Assistant Ship Superintendent on the *USS Santee*, a small aircraft carrier, and the *USS*

*Russell*, a destroyer. On 10 December, Zeigler went out on *USS Santee* sea trials. There were German submarines in the area, but no problems during the trials.

Living conditions were not very desirable in Portsmouth, Virginia. The shipyard was extremely busy and housing was limited. Many shipyard workers were making more money than they ever dreamed of due to long workweeks with overtime pay. We were at war, jobs were plentiful, and pay was good. The shipyard was on a 24/7 production schedule.

Zeigler worked six or seven days a week depending on the needs. He used a bicycle to get around the shipyard during the day. Surprisingly, so did the Admiral in charge, often in a full

dress white uniform. Zeigler also had duty every few weeks when he would be on call 24 hours a day. His "duty" day sometimes did not end until the early hours of the next morning due to ship production going 24 hours a day. Sleep was a bonus.

Several major combatant ships headed for the Pacific theater came in for fitting of 20mm gun mounts to provide additional protection against Japanese air attacks. The *USS Russell* was one of the ships going to the Pacific. Zeigler oversaw its reconfiguration by removing torpedo tubes and adding 20mm gun mounts. When Zeigler first reported to Norfolk Navy Yard it took two years to build a destroyer. Because of the needs of the Navy, that time had to be reduced so outsourcing of major ship components was done. Huge assemblies built elsewhere were brought into the yard and put on a ship, saving months of work at the shipyard.

On 16 February 1942, *USS Alabama* was launched. Zeigler was involved in improving the technique by which the tallow lubricant was applied to the "ways" before launching a ship. Tallow was the traditional lubricant to help the ship slide into the water, but it was difficult to apply. Zeigler helped improve the procedure.

One week after the Alabama launch, Zeigler was assigned to the U.S. Naval Academy for a 30-week course on Naval Architecture—ship design. Life was good at the Naval Academy. He lived with three fellow students. It was a tough course, but the schedule allowed time for weekend sailing on the Severn River. A maid cleaned his living quarters and prepared good meals.

After the course at Annapolis, Zeigler received orders to Maryland Dry Dock Company in Baltimore, Maryland. At the age of 24 as Ship Superintendent and Hull Officer, Zeigler had a great deal of responsibility and was intensely interested in his work. He was in a stressful environment where lives depended on how well he did his job. Zeigler's responsibility was to watch the progress of construction and repair of vessels to be certain the Navy was getting what it was paying for from the contractor.

It was clear how the changing priorities of the war deter-



Lt. Comdr. George E. Zeigler

mined the types of ships worked on at Maryland Dry Dock Company. Attack Transports were needed to take troops to land on the remote islands of the Pacific. Tankers were needed to refuel the ships around the world. Transports were needed to carry supplies to the troops. Repair ships were needed to keep the ships in good operating condition. Motor Torpedo Boat tenders were needed in the Pacific to repair the PT boats, which harassed the Japanese Navy. All Maryland Dry Dock ships had a role to play in the war effort.

Construction was an intense process. There was rarely enough time to do a job “by the book.” In many cases, changes to designs had to be made on the job, and the official drawings of the ship were changed to conform to the reality of construction. Many things could not wait for official approval, because the speed of construction would not allow it. One day while walking by a welder, Zeigler was asked to hold a piece of material while being welded. He did it and was happy to do so as it saved precious minutes for the welder.

While getting material to build ships, sometimes the material could not be obtained on time as a mysterious higher priority project got first call on the material. Not until the atomic bomb was dropped did Zeigler learn the mysterious project was the Manhattan Project leading to the construction of the atomic bomb.

When the war was over in Europe, things changed dramatically. The shipyard began operating on a five-day week instead of seven. Decisions had to be made concerning which ships to finish and those where construction should be stopped. When victory over Japan was declared further issues came to the fore. The question was which ships to decommission, which to scrap and which to put into “mothballs,” i.e., put aside in a manner where they could be reactivated. Several ships not too far along in construction were changed to general merchant hulls so they could be sold to civilian shipping companies.

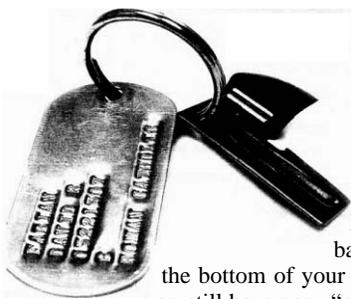
Zeigler was about to be released from active duty in early 1946 when he inquired of a friend in the Bureau of Ships in Washington about observers needed to assess ship damage during Operation Crossroads (the Bikini Atoll atomic bomb tests). The friend said Zeigler could be a person to help do that job if he wanted to do so. He had to agree to extend his time in the Navy until the tests and evaluation were completed. Zeigler agreed and in May 1946 was on his way to Bikini Atoll in the Pacific as an observer to the Atomic bomb tests. These would be the fourth and fifth bombs exploded since the invention of the Atomic bomb. On

1 July 1946, there would be an explosion in the atmosphere and on 23 July an underwater explosion. Zeigler’s job was to help evaluate the damage caused by the explosions to obsolete U.S. ships and captured foreign ships as well as guns, tanks, and other major military equipment. There were about 100 ships and 25,000 persons involved in the project.

The first explosion, observed from 17 miles away, formed the classic mushroom cloud. It sank many ships and damaged all of them. The heat and thunder of the blast took 90 seconds to reach the ship Zeigler was on. Surprisingly, Zeigler remembers no sound from the blast. He was told to face the outside bulkhead (outer wall) of the ship he was on and to cover his eyes with his arms. The protective goggles were not considered sufficient to watch the fireball without risk of blindness. Even so, he remembers the impression of a great light from the explosion. When he turned around to look, he remembers many of the ships with a gray “plume” over them. This was caused by the great suction from the explosion pulling debris from the ship out the funnels and from other ruptures in the hull. After a long day, Zeigler would write up a lengthy report from the day’s findings and have it typed up in the wee hours so it could be sent to higher authority early the next day.

On July 23, the routine was the same except the observers were allowed to watch the underwater explosion from 11 miles away using safety goggles. The violent shock could be felt through the water, and, of course, untold fish were killed and surfaced from the explosion. Again, ships were sunk and heavily damaged. About the only ship that withstood the blasts was a floating concrete repair dock. The radioactive contamination made it necessary to scuttle most ships still afloat. Some were returned to the United States for further study but eventually were sunk. Zeigler finished his Bikini project reports and was released from active duty on 30 August 1946, but with 101 days of leave, his official day of separation was 9 December 1946.

His first significant job after the service was for several years with the Kendall Company, a textile manufacturer. In 1964, he moved to Eden, N.C., and began work as an engineer at Fieldcrest Mills. He completed his working career at Fieldcrest as manager of the Mechanical Development Department, retiring in 1982. Zeigler and his wife, Betty, had two children and three grandchildren. Betty is deceased now, and Zeigler lives in a retirement village in Asheville, N.C. He remembers well his stressful years in the Navy during WWII.



## The P-38 can opener

If you soldiered during World War II, Korea, or Vietnam, somewhere—maybe back in the corner of your dresser drawer, at the bottom of your foot locker, or attached on your keychain—you still have your “good ole P-38.”

You remember—that “lightweight, folding, hand-operated can opener for severing tops of rimmed metal cans,” as Army nomenclature described it. In reality, the durable, handy-dandy, inch-and-a-half metal device that opened your hot or cold C-ration cans had more practical uses than a Swiss Army knife.

Developed by the Subsistence Research Laboratory of Chicago during the summer of 1942, the P-38 was used by service members in combat and training for four decades until the aluminum foil and plastic lam-

inate pouches of MREs—Meals Ready To Eat—replaced canned rations in the 1980’s.

The P-38 can opener was in no way akin to two other famous P-38s of World War II—the P-38 Lightning, the supercharged US fighter aircraft, and the Walther P-38, the 9mm semiautomatic pistol of the Wehrmacht. Supposedly, our ingenious little gadget got its P-38 nickname because it took 38 punctures of its hinged metal tooth to remove the lid of a can of C-rations. But it was also known by many as a “John Wayne” because Wayne showed troops how to use it in a World War II training film.

If you hadn’t seen the Wayne training film, you’d learn how to use the P38 quickly on your own by following the directions on the brown paper wrapper it came in. The wrapper included instructions on how to sterilize the P-38 in an immersion heater or with a match. In training or combat, it also served as a great screwdriver, wire stripper, letter opener, pencil sharpener, muddy boot cleaner, and much more. Best of all, the P-38 was every GI’s meal ticket to that mouthwatering Ham and Lima Beans or Beef Steak—cold or hot, with or without Tabasco.



# The Marines Had a ‘Punch’

By Robert Poole, Jr.

## Forward

When I was a boy growing up in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, my next door neighbors were the Parkers. As my brothers and I would be outside playing late in the afternoon with Eddie, Herb, Mike, or David, the Parker boys would suddenly go racing home to eat supper at the sound of a distant bugle call. The person on the other end of that bugle was a WWII Marine veteran by the name of J. Edgar Parker, but everyone knew him as “Punch.” Apparently he had earned the nickname as a youngster for being a little on the chubby side, somewhat like a punching bag. Punch worked for many years as a meat packer and inspector, owned a neighborhood general store, and served for decades as the Scoutmaster of Troop 162. He was also an active member of Corinth Baptist Church for many years, serving as a deacon and Sunday School Director. He was married to Mazie for 57 years until his death in 2007. Surviving in addition to his four sons and their wives were seven grandchildren.

Punch Parker was without a doubt one of the kindest, most decent and good-humored people that I have ever known. He was always friendly, never took himself too seriously, and would lend a hand to anyone in need. He used to delight in showing off his extensive personal collection of vintage rifles, helmets, swords, flags, and wartime memorabilia to all the neighborhood kids. As I grew a little older and began to understand more about what had happened in World War II, Punch Parker’s incredible experiences fighting against the brutal Japanese war machine in the Pacific Theatre of Battle gradually became known to me.

Punch had learned to blow the bugle in the United States Marine Corps after being drafted in 1943. In addition to serving as a company bugler, he would somehow manage to survive indescribably horrific conditions as a front-line infantryman in the Battle of Okinawa. The bitter struggle on this remote island was by all accounts some of the bloodiest and most savage fighting in all of World War II. Considering the terrible sights and sounds that he endured in a place that one Marine would later describe as “the most ghastly corner of Hell I have ever witnessed,” Punch Parker seemed remarkably well adjusted. His faith, courage, tenacity, patriotism and sense of humor enabled him to pass through a firestorm of unspeakable suffering and death relatively unscathed. This is my humble attempt to tell the story of a true American hero.

Robert Poole, Jr.

## One Young Man’s Journey through the Bloodiest Battle of the Pacific War

“My job was many things, but one of them was to carry messages to all the platoons. I’d either run phone lines or carry the message by voice. Every night we had to have a new password. We’d use something like ‘Chesterfield’ or ‘Camel,’ something with the letter ‘C’ in it. The Japanese couldn’t say ‘C’ because it didn’t sound right.

“It was just about night, and I had to take the password to everybody, because you couldn’t holler it across the field. After dark, you don’t move because you’ll get shot. I was out there on a point, and I just made a beeline across a little gulley to save time. Next morning, I woke up, and looked out across where I had run. There must have been anywhere from 100 to 150 little silver metal points sticking up out of the ground.”

Punch Parker, a 22-year-old United States Marine Corps infantryman and field bugler, had unwittingly passed through an enemy mine field on the battle scarred island of Okinawa.

“Some of them had wires tied between them, so if you hit one, another one would go off. I’d run right through the middle of it and hadn’t hit a thing. The guardian angels were on my shoulders that day! That

was one of those things you’d joke about later. I joked about it and they joked about it. That’s the only way you can live in a situation like that is to joke about it.”

On 1 April 1945, one of the greatest battles of World War II commenced on an island less than 400 miles south of Japan. The Battle of Okinawa, the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific Theatre in World War II, involved more than 1,600 Allied ships and nearly 550,000 Marines, soldiers, sailors, and Army Air Corps flyers. For the Americans, Okinawa would serve as a springboard for the upcoming invasion of Japan. This small Pacific outpost was targeted for conquest due to its relative proximity to the Japanese home islands, its harbors, airfields, and capacity to sustain supply lines for the upcoming attack.

Considered home territory by the Japanese, Okinawa was a place that had to be defended at all costs. If U.S. Naval and Air forces were not stopped here, they would be able to launch virtually uncontested attacks on Japan’s mainland. Desperation to defend this tiny spot of territory in the vast Pacific would lead the Imperial Japanese military forces to sacrifice themselves in ways that would leave America’s fighting men speechless.



Officially known as Operation Iceberg, during the Battle of Okinawa the United States Navy would sustain the largest loss of life and ships in its storied history. Total American casualties in the operation numbered over 12,000 killed, including nearly 5,000 Navy dead and almost 8,000 Marine and Army dead. At least 36,000 were wounded. Thousands more would be taken out of action by combat fatigue.

Okinawa was the first major battle in the Pacific campaign where large numbers of civilians would get caught in the cross-fire between American and Japanese forces. While exact numbers are impossible to determine, it is estimated that a third of the island's civilian inhabitants, or around 150,000 people, were killed in the fighting. Anywhere from 80 to 90 percent of the island's buildings would also be destroyed. More than 100,000 Japanese soldiers and native conscripts made the decision to either fight to the death or commit suicide.

The war in the Pacific was unlike any war that had ever taken place in modern history. It was a war of annihilation driven by pure hatred where no quarter was to be given. The historical, social, political, economic and military traditions of two radically different cultures produced a mutual revulsion that led each side to believe the other to be inferior and subhuman. The Battle of Okinawa, the last battle of World War II, would be a fight to the death on the land, air and sea.

This was the grim situation where Marines like Junior Edgar Parker found themselves on that Easter Sunday in 1945. Parker, who before the war worked in the family grocery store and meat packing business, was a young man who found himself literally on the other side of the world facing a determined and fanatical enemy. This is his story.

### Off to War

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, young men either volunteered or were drafted into military service across the United States. After receiving his draft notice, young J. Edgar Parker decided he wanted to enter the United States Marine Corps "because it was the most respected and the toughest outfit available." He officially entered into the service of his country on 6 August 1943.



"We had a physical examination in Elizabeth City to see if you could walk, talk, or crawl. Then we went to Ft. Bragg for a complete physical. Right there it was decided what branch they would put you in. You could have a choice if you passed your physical at the highest level. Then we went to Raleigh and were sworn in. We came back home for ten days, and then we went to Parris Island for boot camp."

Parker was one of 204,509 recruits who were trained at Parris Island between 1941 and 1945 for service in World War

II. Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island is an 8,095 acre military installation near Beaufort, S.C., tasked with the training of enlisted Marines. Recruits living east of the Mississippi River reported here to receive their initial training.

"My Boot Camp platoon was 619. Me and two other guys from Elizabeth City chose the Marines. The three of us went to boot camp together."

### May 1942

After making it through boot camp, the Marine Corps decided that Parker would go to Field Music School.

"I was in the Central High School Band in Elizabeth City, but guess what? I beat the drum! So they taught me how to blow the bugle, because I didn't know how. After I passed the school, they put me in the infantry."

After completing his initial training, Parker proceeded to Camp Pendleton Marine Base in San Diego, California, serving a brief stint as company bugler.



"Then they sent us directly overseas on a troop transport ship to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands for additional training. I was assigned to I Company, 3rd Battalion, 29th Marines."

While steaming across the vast Pacific Ocean en route to their destination, the Marines and sailors aboard Parker's ship faced a time-honored naval tradition known as "Crossing the Line."

This was a ritual that marked a mariner's first time crossing the equator. It had been undertaken in the distant past to see if a new sailor had what it took to endure the hardships faced by extended periods at sea.

"You were a pollywog before, and if you lived through it, you were a shellback," Parker remembers. "They'd make you crawl on your hands and knees, and there were about 4000 of us aboard. You only had the bottom part of your underdrawers on. They were shooting water on the deck to keep it cool. Every now and then somebody would stick a hot wire on you to shock you a little. A lot of people had clippers, and they'd cut clumps out of your hair."



"Then you'd end up with ol' King Neptune setting on a throne in front of a big pool of dirty water. They'd throw you in it, and they'd squirt some kind of mess in your mouth. It was the bitterest stuff I'd ever tasted in my whole life. Then they'd take you out and throw you on the other side. One guy hit his head when they threw him in the water, and he got knocked out. He came out the other side cold! They grabbed him and brought him back, though. With 4,000 people going through there in one day, they had to hustle. It was an experience. It was more fear of the unknown. What's going to happen next?"

### Guadalcanal

From September 1944 until March 1945, Parker and his fellow Marines trained incessantly in the brutal tropical heat of Guadalcanal for the upcoming battle on Okinawa. There he



Pollywog to Shellback ceremony as the ship crossed the equator on the way to Guadalcanal.

became a member of the legendary Sixth Marine Division under the command of Major General Lemuel Shepard. This was the only Division that, as an entire unit, never spent as much as one day in the continental United

States. The Sixth Marine Division was uniquely formed to fight in the battle of Okinawa and never reactivated after World War II. Formed around the core of the First Provisional Marine Brigade, it was composed of three infantry regiments: the 4th Marines, 22d Marines and 29th Marines, an artillery regiment, the 15th Marines, and subordinate units such as Engineer, Medical, Pioneer, Motor Transport, Tank, Headquarters and Service battalions.

### The Sixth Division

Even though the Sixth Marine Division was new, it was composed mainly of hardened veterans from other campaigns, such as Guam and Saipan. As a matter of fact, seven out of the nine infantry battalions that composed the division had fought in several major island campaigns. The 2d and 3d battalions were new units with a number of green troops, but were led by many seasoned and battle tested officers and NCOs.



Marine Major General Lemuel Shepherd, Commanding General of the 6th Marine Division.

Major combat operations that had taken place earlier on the island during the hellish Battle of Guadalcanal had by and large ceased, so for the next seven months Parker and the newly arrived Marines settled into a mind-numbing routine of preparing for war.

“Training is boring. You get so sick of it. You do the same thing over, and over, and over. But you do it so you will automatically do it. When you get in a situation, you don’t have to stop and think about what you are supposed to do.

You just do it. That’s what gives you confidence, too.”

He also recalled, “Training would be to go out and hike 25 miles and play war. We had to start our hiking around 1 a.m. because during the daytime, it was 110 degrees in the shade every day. Right sticky hot! All you had to do was train, and there was no place to go to get into trouble. There really wasn’t much spare time or place for recreation. No bars, no bowling alleys, and no good time girls! I think I saw one USO show the whole time on Guadalcanal. Drinking and drugs weren’t a problem because no one could get it, even if they wanted to. This was before the big time drug era.”

While most Leathernecks had an area of specialized knowledge, they still lived by the creed that “every Marine is a rifleman.”

Parker was “trained on the M1 rifle, M1 carbine, the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), light and heavy machine gun, bazooka, bayonet, and flame thrower. We were also taught how to throw grenades. My primary weapon was the M1 carbine. It was a good weapon, semi-automatic. It had 8 shots. It was very reliable, and you very seldom ever had a jam.”

Marion F. Sturkey, who authored *Warrior Culture of the U.S. Marines*, noted that “In boot camp at Parris Island or San Diego, no one escapes from the Rifleman’s Creed. Every Marine is trained, first and foremost, as a rifleman, for it is the rifleman who must close with and destroy the enemy. The rifleman remains the most basic tenet of Marine Corps doctrine. All else revolves around him. Marine Aviation, Marine Armor, Marine Artillery, and all supporting arms and warfighting assets exist to support the rifleman. Every Marine must memorize this creed.

And every Marine must live by the creed.”

### The Rifleman’s Creed

WRITTEN BY MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM H. RUPERTUS

*This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than the enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will. My rifle and I know that what counts in war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, or the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit.*

*My rifle is human, even as I am human, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strengths, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other.*

*Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and I are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.*

*So be it, until victory is America’s and there is no enemy.*

### Field Bugler

In addition to his duties as a rifleman, Punch Parker also used his newly learned skills as a field bugler to help organize and discipline the daily routine of his fellow Leathernecks.

“Being a field bugler, I had a day on and a day off. On my day off, I’d follow the other guys around and try and learn how to do their jobs. That gave me a chance to learn how to use all the weapons and to get familiar with the rest of the guys. As far as being a bugler, I had to blow all the calls. I woke them up in the morning, called them out to chow, called the assemblies, putting the flag up in the morning and taking it down in the afternoon. Then at night you’d play ‘Taps’ and put them to bed.”

Within the first six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan had captured vast stretches of territory in the Pacific. However, the tide began to turn in 1942 as the United States began to assert its overwhelming economic and military power against the Empire of the Rising Sun. The Japanese war machine was halted at Coral Sea, decimated at Midway, and defeated at Guadalcanal. American military might destroyed her army, naval and air forces across a wide swath of the Pacific in places such as Tarawa, Leyte, Peleliu, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. *Operation Iceberg*, the code name given to the U.S. attack on Okinawa, would be the latest in a campaign of “island hopping” that would lead to the ultimate invasion and occupation of the Japanese mainland. Marines like Punch Parker would form the tip of the spear thrust into the heart of a wounded but still dangerous enemy.



Punch Parker, USMC, in 1945

### Heading to War

“As soon as the training was over, we headed towards Okinawa in March 1945,” he recounted. “We went straight into



Landing on the Hagushi beaches on 1 April 1945.

combat. The day we landed, they chose not to oppose us. We went in right on shore.”

Much as the Japanese military command had decided not to challenge the Marines face to face on the beaches of Iwo Jima. On Okinawa they again employed a similar strategy of “wait and bait” by digging in and inflicting as many casualties as possible on the invaders once they moved inland. By 1945, the Japanese knew they could no longer defeat the American forces in a direct conflict, but decided that their best option was to bloody the enemy, demoralize him through a war of attrition, and hope to negotiate a settlement to end the hostilities.

Defeat and occupation of their sacred homeland was simply unthinkable. The end result was that the closer the American forces got to the home islands of Japan, the more desperate and determined the Japanese fought. The Japanese soldiers knew that they would almost certainly die in service of their Living God Emperor Hirohito, and were told to take the lives of ten Americans before their own death. The stage was set for an epic battle that would rival fighting anywhere else in the entire war for its sheer firepower, destruction, and staggering loss of life.

#### “Love-Day”

In late March of 1945, the U.S. Navy would unleash a bombardment on selected targets in an effort to “soften up” Okinawa prior to the invasion. The intensity of this offshore barrage and many others like it during the 3-month-long battle would be dubbed a “typhoon of steel” by the native Okinawans. The initial landings of “L-Day” or “Love-Day” began at around 8:30 a.m. on 1 April 1945, and took place on the west coast of Okinawa in an area known as the Hagushi beaches. The plan was for the First and Sixth Marines to land on two locations known as Red Beach and Green Beach, and cut the island in two.

By the end of that April Fool’s day, some 60,000 troops had moved ashore with virtually no opposition. After the unexpectedly quiet landing on Okinawa took place, the two Marine divisions moved west to east, then north. One Marine allegedly quipped immediately after the unchallenged amphibious assault that he had “already lived longer than he expected.”

“As soon as we turned and moved towards the north end of the island, that’s when it started,” recalls Parker. Within a week the Marines had secured Nago, the second largest city on the island. Although they encountered resistance as they moved up the Motobu Peninsula, the Marines had effectively destroyed organized opposition in the north by the third week of April. Parker and his fellow Leathernecks thought their job was done.

“We worked on that two-thirds of the island. In fact, three

quarters of the island was secured in a month and a half. The U.S. Army had turned south and when we came back, they were right where we left them. The Japanese had formed a line and stopped them right there.”

The 10th Army had run into stiff opposition on their southward trek, and had essentially bogged down. After an intense internal debate among American commanders about the next course of action, it was decided that Marines would replace Army units at the end of April on the front lines around an area known as the Shuri-Yonaburu Line. This was a high ridge that bisected Okinawa, and was distinguished by an ancient medieval fortification known as Shuri Castle. The Japanese 32d army, led by General Mitsuru Ushijima, would turn this position into a killing field as they sought to inflict maximum damage on the advancing Americans.

The rugged natural terrain of Okinawa was used as a weapon by the Japanese to slow the advance of the Marine and Army units into a bloody war of attrition. The island, merely 64 miles long and 18 miles wide, was honeycombed with numerous natural caves linked by tunnels that were turned into elaborate fortresses stocked with reserves of ammunition, food, water, and medical supplies. Working without heavy mechanized machinery, over a seven month period before the invasion, upwards of 100,000 Japanese troops, Okinawan Home Guard conscripts, and slave laborers, dug miles of underground tunnels with hand tools. It was said that you could travel from the east to west coast of the island through the Shuri line and never actually come above ground. The headquarters of the 32d Imperial Japanese Army would be located as deep as 160 feet directly under Shuri Castle as part of an elaborate complex of subterranean fortifications that would stretch in some places over a thousand yards.

#### “Spider Holes”

Life on the ground for Marines like Punch Parker around the Shuri line would become a nightmarish grind of avoiding the withering barrage of enemy fire.

“On a day to day basis, we were running and ducking in holes. You had to run every place you went. You couldn’t afford to get out and walk. Every time you stopped, you had to dig a foxhole for protection against artillery, mortars, machine guns, and snipers. The battle on Okinawa was a little different than a lot of battles. You didn’t see who you were shooting at. The Japanese were dug into the hills; they had caves with hospitals and living quarters right inside the mountains. They would just come to the opening to shoot at you, drop mortars, fire artillery at you, then duck back in the holes. They had all the high ground. You had to go up to them. That’s what made it so difficult to finally take it over. They’d let you go by them sometimes, then they’d come up behind you. Then they’d tag you from both sides. We got caught in that several times. The Japanese soldiers were very devious, you might say. Sometimes they’d dig a ‘spider hole’ out in the middle of a field, put bushes over it, wait till you walked by, then jump up and shoot you in the back. They didn’t last very long



General Mitsuru Ushijima  
Japanese commander  
on Okinawa

when they did that, either!"

### **Burned and Buried Alive**

Before the iconic Battle of Iwo Jima in February 1945, Japanese tactics often consisted of suicidal Banzai charges where waves of soldiers would rush the enemy in an attempt to overwhelm and annihilate their position. However, this strategy would change as the American forces pressed closer to Japanese home islands. The previous offensive mindset was replaced by a defensive posture where the Imperial Japanese Army would dig in and fight a bloody campaign of stall tactics designed to impose maximum casualties on the opposition.

It was said that during the Battle of Iwo Jima that the Japanese were not "on" Iwo Jima, they were "in" Iwo Jima. Much the same can be said about the Battle of Okinawa, where some Marines and U.S. Army troops said they rarely saw a live Japanese soldier almost the entire time they were in combat there. American forces would once again have to scorch the enemy to death with flame throwers in their reinforced bunkers or drop explosive charges deep into the underground tunnels and caves, entombing them for eternity in the rugged mountain fortresses.

Parker recalled that "Once in a while, you had the chance to see them out in the open. They were smart enough to mainly stay inside the mountains. So we had to seal them in the mountains, fill up the holes, drop napalm and explosives in the holes. We dropped some one day and we saw at least 15 or 20 clouds of smoke coming from all throughout that hill. They had that many outlets to each one of the caves. That's why it was so hard. They'd come out the back side of the mountain. You had to seal off the entire mountain. They had machine guns, mortars, artillery, and rifle fire on the line they formed. It took over a month to break it."

### **"Sugar Loaf Hill"**

As if the situation on Okinawa were not bad enough, during the month of May monsoon rains had begun to turn the battlefield into a muddy quagmire. Every road became virtually impassible as heavy mechanized machinery bogged down in the morass. Men struggled to even walk in what was often a knee-deep muck. When the Marines pushed to take Naha, the capital of Okinawa, they would first have to run a gauntlet of what had been thought to be an insignificant group of hills that would become known as Half Moon, Horseshoe, and Sugar Loaf. This period in mid-May would herald some of the most intense and savage fighting in the history of the United States Marine Corps. The Battle of Sugar Loaf Hill, in particular, would become hallowed ground in the annals of Marine Corps history for both the ferocity of the combat and the unbridled courage and determination of the men who fought and died there.

Day to day progress in defeating the entrenched enemy would often be measured in mere yards of blood stained soil. In places such as Wana Draw and Dakeshi Ridge, the Japanese dropped a murderous combination of mortars, artillery and machine gun fire from the steep hills above onto the exposed Leathernecks below night and day. Sergeant Neil Van Riper of the First Marines recalled: "I'd be flat on the ground and notice an ant or a bug and

think, 'I wish I was that small.' There was never a time when you weren't afraid."

Miles of interconnected tunnels would enable the hidden Japanese to move freely underground from position to position to rain down their firestorm of death. In one week's time the Sixth Division would endure well over 2,000 casualties as Sugar Loaf Hill was assaulted up to eleven times.

Punch Parker was all too familiar with the horrors of war as his fellow Marines were killed and wounded in epic proportions. Some companies would be wiped out, filled with replacements, only to be annihilated again.

"A company of Marines is 250 people," he recalled. "You operated by platoons. One company would take a section and try to hold it. A battalion had an area, and that was three rifle companies. I had a company roster, and out of the original 250 people, I figured out we had 87% casualties (wounded or killed in action). According to the official records, they said we had 90% casualties in that three-month period."

In scenes that would rival descriptions of Hell from Dante's *Inferno*, the flooded battlefield around the Shuri line degenerated

into a grotesque barren subtropical wasteland poisoned by a witches' brew of blood, mud, rotting corpses, maggots, flies, and lead. It was said that anyone sliding down the greasy slopes could easily find their pockets full of maggots at the end of the journey.

### **"Hell's Own Cesspool"**

Private First Class Eugene B. Sledge, a member of the 1st Marine Division, described his experience on Okinawa as "the most ghastly corner of Hell I had ever witnessed. Every crater was half full of water, and many of them held a Marine corpse. The bodies lay pathetically just as they had been killed, half submerged in muck and water, rusting weapons still in

hand. Swarms of big flies hovered about them." Wherever he looked, Sledge saw "maggots and decay. Men struggled and fought and bled in an environment so degrading I believed we had been flung into Hell's own cesspool."

Punch Parker shared similar memories of the unimaginable filth that his Marine companions endured. "I'd say if you saw a bunch of pigs in a pigpen, that's just about what you had with us. You couldn't really take a bath, because you couldn't afford to take off your boots. You might have to get up and run. You'd stay right up on the front line for two weeks, and after the Japanese beat you down and we didn't have many people left, they'd send another company in and let you come back maybe a mile or two and camp around an artillery gun. We'd find us a ditch someplace and take a bath and get a fresh uniform."

Given the unimaginable amount of artillery shells, mortars, and bullets flying around the island of Okinawa, it almost defies belief that J. Edgar Parker was never actually wounded in action. "I had to drag all the rest of them out. Somebody had to!" In addition to his previously mentioned near miss in the mine field, however, he did have a other scrapes with death.

"One of the closest calls I had was when I was running across this opening to get from one part of the company to the other.



A Marine demolition crew destroys one of many Japanese caves on Okinawa.



A U.S. Marine evades enemy machine gun fire at a place called "Death Valley."

When I got to the other side a guy said he saw a tracer disappear right in my shirt tail. With a tracer there are three more live bullets with it. I'm not sure because I didn't see it. Lots of

bullets would pop around you sometimes. Another time I had an artillery shell explode on the hill right above me. It covered me and about five or six other guys up with hot rocks and dirt."

In a place filled with so much suffering and death, Punch Parker was able to witness first-hand one true source of human compassion: the Navy Corpsman. They had the unenviable task of stopping the bleeding in Marines who had suffered horrific wounds, administering morphine to dull their pain, starting IV lines, and comforting the dying. Their life-sustaining heroics usually took place under filthy conditions while themselves dodging enemy bullets and artillery.

"I saw one of our guys one day, and he had a mortar hit right at his feet. It had blown one leg and an arm off, and he was black with dirt and covered in blood. He was conscious, but in shock. We went to get him to take him back, and he said 'No.' He knew he was going to die. The corpsman sat out there with him until he died so he wouldn't be alone. Things like that happened quite a bit. That's why I always say Navy corpsmen are number one in my book!"

Marines on the front lines also had to be constantly on guard at night with the real possibility that Japanese infiltrators would creep up to their foxholes and drop a grenade on them or slit their throats as they slept. In addition to enduring the torrential rains in an exposed fighting position, Parker was also forced at times to sleep in cave tombs among the dead in order to survive.

"We slept, but we didn't sleep. You had to sleep with one eye open. A mosquito would fly past you and you'd wake up. The idea was that you'd sleep two to a hole. One sleeps, and one stays awake. I don't think anybody did much sleeping. The enemy knew the lay of the land, and we didn't. Most of the time there wasn't much night fighting, because if you moved, you got shot."

In one of the rare moments where he actually saw a Japanese soldier up close, Parker recalled that "We did have one come out of a hole in the mountain right in the middle of where we had stopped for the night. He came out and walked right through our company. We couldn't shoot him, because we were liable to shoot some of our own people. When he cleared us, he ran like a deer!"

Okinawa, the largest of 72 islands in the Ryukyu archipelago, is about a third the size of Rhode Island. Its lush, subtropical environment, sometimes called the "Galapagos of the Orient" for its diversity of unique plants and animals, came with an abundance of home grown creatures to torment the Marines. In addition to clouds of mosquitoes, poisonous centipedes, deadly snakes, and blood-sucking leeches, the island was plagued by flies.

"There were blowflies as big as your thumb. The island's main crop evidently was sugarcane. They had a big sugarcane

mill there. We blew it up and set it on fire. I went by it a month later, and it was still burning. Every time a bullet or shell would hit a stalk of sugarcane, it would break it and bleed. The blowflies were just swarming on that place. After we got air supremacy, they took transport planes and sprayed DDT on the whole island."

### The Thousand Yard Stare

Throughout the history of warfare, there have been numerous terms used to describe soldiers that have been traumatized by the terrors of combat. Shell Shock, Combat Fatigue, and Combat Stress Reaction are common clinical names. All refer to a short-term loss of psychological clarity and motivation that basically amount to a battlefield nervous breakdown.

Combat Fatigue decreases the combatant's fighting capability, and its most common symptoms are exhaustion, slow reaction times, indecision, disconnection from one's surroundings, and inability to prioritize.

One of the most easily recognizable signs of combat fatigue is the proverbial "thousand yard stare," which refers to the unfocused, glassy eyed gaze of a battle weary soldier. Soldiers have developed a variety of defense mechanisms to keep their sanity, and for "Punch" Parker, it was humor.

"Believe it or not, the best way I saw to handle the stress of combat was to joke about it. It wasn't a joke, but you would joke about how close somebody came to getting killed. If you started getting morbid about it, you'd end up getting combat fatigue. It would blow your mind."

It has been said that in order for a soldier to keep his sanity in combat, he must "learn to forget" the horrific sights and sounds of the battlefield. Parker discovered that simply blocking out any thoughts of his own possible death in combat served him well. "I never thought about getting killed. It never crossed my mind. That's the kind of thing you don't think about. A scared man is no good to you, because he'll cause you to get killed," he stated matter of factly.

The largest number of combat fatigue cases ever recorded by the United States military occurred during the Battle of Okinawa. There were more than 26,000 non-battle casualties, which resulted in a costly depletion of front-line strength.

"I think there were about 15 or 20 out of our company that developed combat fatigue. One of them, in particular, they were carrying him back to the aid station, and he got shot in the back. In the book, he was wounded in action. But he had really just 'flipped out.' Now when those guys flip out, you've got to hold them in the hole. They'll squeal and holler. At night, especially, they'll let the enemy know where you are. You can't let them get up and run, because they'd get killed. The part about it is they'd take them back to the aid station, and in about a week, they'd send them right back to you. As soon as they got in a hot spot again, they'd go right back off the end. It'd take two or three people to restrain them before you could get them back to the aid station."

### Suicide

Retaining one's honor was paramount in the mindset of the Imperial Japanese Army soldier in World War II. It was widely believed that surrendering to the enemy not only brought shame and dishonor onto the individual soldier, but to his family and nation as well. Parker recalls that "there were a lot of suicidal Japanese, evidently. It was very seldom you'd ever get one to sur-

render. They'd usually kill themselves before they'd surrender."

Fighting to the death or committing suicide was considered much more honorable in the Japanese warrior culture than surrendering. Suicide in the form of human wave Banzai assaults, deliberately crashing aircraft into enemy ships, or ritualistic self-disembowelment (known as "seppuku") were common practices in the various branches of the Japanese military in World War II. Parker recalled that many enemy soldiers committed suicide by simply blowing themselves up with their own hand grenades.

"In fact, a lot of times, we'd hear them at night. We'd get them cornered. They had these grenades where you had to hit them on something to set the charge off. They'd hit it on their helmet and blow themselves up. That happened quite often."

According to Ann Kluttz-Parker, Edgar Parker's daughter in law, Punch once told her that "when the Marines captured a Japanese soldier that the enemy would beg for their life and say things like, 'I love America. I love the Marines. I love your mother' over and over. The Japanese believed that in order to be a U.S. Marine, they had to kill their own mothers. I guess that would be enough to scare anyone. I think that he also said that the Japanese didn't show quite this much fear with the other branches of service."

Kluttz-Parker also told the touching story about how one time Punch talked about coming across the corpses of an old Okinawan man and woman. Their bodies were decayed, but the woman still had long hair. The couple was holding hands. He thought that "it was so endearing."

#### **Life Not Worth a Penny**

The value placed on the life of the young draftees in the Imperial Japanese Army was practically next to nothing. These soldiers were referred to as Issen Gorin, which translates to "one yen, five rin," the cost of mailing a draft notice postcard (less than an American penny).

What this meant was that their life was worth essentially no more than the cost of the letter mailed to draft them into the service of their country. It was not surprising that these young men on the bottom rung of such a rigid military hierarchy were thought of by their superiors as nothing more than expendable assets to use and abuse. The Issen Gorin caught in the middle of such an unfortunate predicament would simply have to do exactly as they were told. This usually translated into enduring deplorable battlefield conditions, fighting to the last man, or even committing suicide for the glory of the Emperor.

The Japanese airmen who deliberately crashed their aircraft into U.S. Navy warships, referred to as "kamikaze" pilots, were one of the most deadly threats faced by Marines, sailors, and soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa. This tactic was yet another example of the extreme measures and self sacrifice that the Japanese would employ to protect their sacred homeland.

"They had a lot of aircraft when we first got there," Parker recalled. "In fact, on the ship we were on, one of the kamikazes took a dive at it. Just by having enough flak hit him to deflect him, he missed us by about a hundred yards. During that time we lost hundreds of ships in the harbor. I read that it was the most costly and bloodiest battle that the Navy had ever fought in its

history."

To be exact, the United States Navy did sustain the largest loss of ships in its history with 36 destroyed and 368 damaged. Most of these losses were a direct result of the fanatically determined actions of suicidal kamikaze pilots. The Navy also sustained the largest loss of life in a single battle with almost 5,000 killed and an equal number wounded.

In addition to kamikaze pilots, there were also naval vessels both large and small that would sacrifice themselves for the nation. The world's largest battleship, the Imperial Japanese Naval vessel *Yamato*, would be destroyed by U.S. torpedo bombers in what amounted to a suicide mission in an attempt to thwart the invasion.

By the end of May, the horrific fighting along Shuri Heights began to subside as General Ushijima withdrew his forces further south. He decided to make a last stand in a cave command post near the sea. With their backs against the wall, several units made final Banzai charges and were cut down. As his options dwindled by late June 1945, the General and his Chief of Staff, Lt. General Isamu Cho, would commit ritualistic suicide before surrendering to the American forces. It was actually considered quite a shock when 7,400 out of the original 115,000 Japanese soldiers and conscripts on



A group of Japanese prisoners who preferred capture to suicide.

Okinawa actually decided to surrender rather than fight to the death.

After 82 days of some of the most savage fighting in the entire Pacific campaign, the Battle of Okinawa came to an end on 21 June 1945. The flag was raised on the southern end of the island by Marines of George Company, 22d Regiment, 6th Marines.

Punch Parker was one of only 60 original members of his company of 250 Marines to survive.

#### **Aftermath**

After the Battle of Okinawa, Parker and the surviving members of the 6th Division reformed in July to train for what was thought to be the imminent invasion of Japan. The island of Okinawa was being prepared for its role as a strategic base for American bombers and fighter aircraft to reach Kyushu, the southern tip of the Japanese homeland. The battle-hardened Marines faced the daunting prospect of squaring off against even more determined and fanatical enemy resistance by the entire Japanese populace.

It was received with considerable relief by all members of the United States Armed Forces that Emperor Hirohito had surrendered unconditionally after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The fanatical resistance displayed by the Japanese forces on Okinawa and other Pacific islands helped President Harry Truman make the decision to end the war through the use of the newly acquired atomic weapons. The real prospect of facing up to one million American casualties in addition to perhaps millions more Japanese in a full scale invasion of the mainland would essentially force his hand on this matter.

#### **The End of the War**

Upon hearing of the enemy capitulation, Punch Parker fond-

ly remembered that “We all cheered! They let us raise Cain an extra hour or two that night. We were on Guam at the time, getting ready to go to Japan. We were tickled to death. The atomic bomb saved my life, a lot of American lives, and a lot of Japanese lives. That feeling was universal among the soldiers. A Japanese lady even told me in the last 10 years that the bomb saved a lot of Japanese lives. They would have been fighting us with bricks and sticks. We’d have had to do like in Vietnam, shoot women and children. She told me that when she was eight years old, she had to leave town because it had been bombed so bad. She lived on a farm, and they gave them sharpened, pointed pieces of bamboo. They were told that if they ever saw an American, attack them.”

While the Battle of Okinawa was the largest and bloodiest single battle of the entire war in the Pacific, its place in history has often been overshadowed by a number of monumental events that happened during the same relative timeframe of the campaign. One reason is that it took place between the iconic Battle of Iwo Jima and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. Other factors include the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945, Harry Truman’s subsequent ascendancy as the new Commander in Chief, and the surrender of Nazi Germany in May. A level of war weariness had also entered the American psyche by the spring of 1945 with the defeat of the Nazi war machine. Most people simply wanted the long nightmare to be over.

#### **VJ Day**

“After VJ (Victory over Japan) Day in August 1945, we left Guam and went to Tsingtao, China.”

Parker, along with two Marine divisions, proceeded to China to assist with the repatriation of Japanese forces. While in China, he witnessed the surrender of the Japanese to Chiang Kai-shek on the USS Missouri.

“Chiang Kai-shek’s troops were in China, the Communist troops were in China, the Japanese troops were in China, and neither one wanted to surrender to the other. So, the Marines went to China, accepted the Japanese surrender, and shipped them back to Japan. We didn’t even guard them; we just let them guard themselves. We thought that much of them! Some had their families with them, and we sent the families back to Japan.”

Parker had mixed feelings about the people of Japan and the way the war was handled by their leadership. “The Japanese people were like us in some ways. When their government declared war, they had to fight just like we did. But they were also very brutal. After the war, they did have war crimes trials, which should have been done. It wasn’t the fact that we had a war; it was the way they performed in the war. The atrocities they did were uncalled for. The Germans were bad enough, but the Japanese were worse. Except for what the Germans did to the Jews, of course.”

#### **Experience in China**

After the terrifying ordeal on Okinawa, Parker and his fellow Marines of the 6th Division were finally able to unwind and enjoy themselves a little in Tsingtao.

“The Chinese people were friendly and happy to see us. We were taking the Japanese off their hands. The Japanese treated them mighty tough. When we came in town, they had a big parade, and they lined the streets and cheered. We couldn’t understand what they were saying, though. They had restaurants where we could go eat; you could walk all over the town. Of course we

still practiced war maneuvers just in case.”

With the departure of the Japanese army, a new struggle for power emerged in the Chinese countryside between Nationalist and Communist forces.

“We were so close to the Communists that we could hear their gunfire at night. You could see the flashes off in the distance. They were that close to the town, trying to drive Chiang Kai-shek’s troops out. It was not a very comfortable position for us to be in. Several times the guards at the gate to our compound got shot at. We didn’t really know who it was, though.”

Parker’s tour of duty ended five months after the end of World War II. He was able to visit Peking and Tokyo before his final departure.

“We stayed in China from October 1945 to March 1946. When my points were enough to get out, they sent me right on back to California. From there I went to Camp Lejeune, and then home.”

#### **Coming Back Home**

“After the war, I came back home and went to work. I did meat packing and worked at the family grocery store. In the 1960s and early 70s, I was a meat inspector for the state of North Carolina. I did that until I had cancer. They retired me on a disability. Then I went in the junk business! Good junk! Antique junk!”

Punch Parker believed that the so called “Greatest Generation” of young men who came of age in the Great Depression of the 1930s were perhaps uniquely qualified to fight the monumental battles of the Second World War.

“I think my generation was more prepared to do something like this because we had people who had worked hard all their lives. They were more conditioned for it, really. Nowadays, I don’t think the young people are physically and mentally in the shape we were in at that time. Life was a little harder then; you figured on having some hard knocks. But now, nobody figures on hard knocks, they only figure on good times.”

#### **Semper Fidelis**

J. Edgar Parker was a proud Marine and a true-blue American patriot. He never wore his patriotism on his sleeve, but quietly lived the Marine Corps motto of “Semper Fidelis” (Always Faithful) through his example. “Punch” was always faithful to his God, Country, fellow Marines, family, Boy Scouts, community, and friends.

“As far as my overall wartime experience, I would say there was a lot of pride. I don’t really have regrets. If I had to do it over, I’d do the same thing again. During those three months on Okinawa, I had a lot of experiences I don’t want to have again. But I think it let me know that this life is worth living, and it’s worth fighting for, and our way of life is worth fighting for.”

The Sixth Marine Division was decorated with the Presidential Unit Citation with Battle Star for its heroism on the Island of Okinawa.

#### **In Memoriam**

J. Edgar “Punch” Parker, 84, of Elizabeth City died on Saturday, 22 September 2007, at Albemarle Hospital. Punch was born on 20 December 1922 in Pasquotank County, North Carolina, to Robert Linwood and Louisa Jennings Parker. He was the youngest of three children.

Punch graduated from Central High School in 1941. He played the bass drum in the high school band and was the catch-

er on the baseball team.

On August 6, 1943, Punch joined the United States Marine Corps. After the war Punch returned to Elizabeth City and joined the family business, R. L. Parker Packing Company, a country store and wholesale meat packing plant. For over 30 years, Punch flourished as an aficionado of military history, collectible antiques, and glorified junk.

Punch fell in love with his sweetheart, Mazie Alexander Vereen on 21 June 1950. They were blessed with 57 years of marriage, four sons, and seven grandchildren. The Parkers have been faithful members of Corinth Baptist Church. He served as Superintendent of the Sunday School for over 30 years and has been a deacon in the church since the 1950s. He was a member of the Men's Bible Class and also a member of the Pasquotank Ruritan Club for many years.

In 1963 Punch, along with his 11-year old son Eddie, joined local Boy Scout Troop 162. Over the next 30 years Punch worked

with the Boy Scouts and served as the Scout Master for 15 years, and, until recently, chairman of the local Eagle Scout Review Board.

### **Packed Away**

*The whole thing smells of innocence  
hanging there in a forgotten corner.  
It's smaller than it used to be  
the summer green's faded like my youth  
worn by the vices of age  
preserved only by wisdom promised  
but somehow misplaced.*

*The rebellions of youth give way to compromise  
leaving the ideals of boyhood trapped  
behind the Eagle sewn to the thin pocket  
of my Boy Scout shirt.*

# John Newland Maffitt

By Tim Winstead

On 4 August 1943, a former resident of the Cape Fear was honored for service to his state and nation. The Liberty Ship *John N. Maffitt* was christened at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. This ship took on the duties of running a blockade as its namesake had done nearly eighty years previous. This essay followed Maffitt's career, his activities in the Cape Fear and the contributions he made to two nations. The essay attempted to answer one question: Did John Newland Maffitt do his duty to the best of his abilities? In a small way, the voyages of the John N. Maffitt represented the final actions of the remarkable man.

On 22 February 1819, John Newland Maffitt was born in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at longitude 40° W, latitude 50° N. Maffitt's future was on the Atlantic Ocean and it became the stage upon which he played his role as an officer in the United States and Confederate States Navies. Alexander D. Bache, superintendent of the United States Coast Survey, characterized Maffitt as "not only a through seaman and game to the backbone but a man of superior intellect, a humorist of rare excellence, and one of the most delightful companions." In the ensuing years, Maffitt displayed these characteristics, especially backbone, in the performance of his duties.

Maffitt's father, John Newland Maffitt, Sr., and his mother, Ann Carnic, were Irish immigrants that came to America in 1819 to begin a new life. Maffitt, Sr., was a Methodist minister who loved poetry and words. Ann, an Irish beauty, cared little for poetry but was dedicated to the more practical pursuits of "turning a penny." The life of an itinerant Connecticut preacher was not rewarded with material gains but with spiritual rewards. The Maffitts were not suitable partners and their marriage dissolved under strain caused by the preacher's meager income. In 1824, the younger Maffitt was adopted by his uncle, Dr. William Maffitt, and taken to Fayetteville, North Carolina. Maffitt, Sr., remained in the ministry and became "the Methodist meteor." He developed a magnetic personality and was "finished, flowery,

and dazzling, a scintillating genius, a perfect master of rhetoric." Ann took the other children and moved to Galveston, Texas, where she succeeded in building a fashionable hotel. Maffitt reflected attributes of both his parents as he grew into manhood.

Maffitt thrived at his uncle's home, Eilerslie, and always considered himself to be a North Carolinian. He loved life at Eilerslie and fondly said late in his life, "I love every blade of grass in the dear old place." In 1828 at the age of nine, Maffitt travelled alone by stage to White Plains, New York. During this journey, Maffitt showed two primary characteristics that became a part of his nature: love of adventure and the absence of fear. His uncle enrolled Maffitt at a classical boarding school where he was exposed to a rigorous study of literature, grammar, composition, elocution, math, and science. Maffitt applied himself to his studies at the White Plains Academy. His four years at White Plains prepared him for his future occupation. On 25 February 1832, President Andrew Jackson appointed the 13-year-old Maffitt as an acting midshipman in the United States Navy.

Prior to the establishment of the Naval Academy in 1845, cadet training involved years of sea apprenticeship followed by a difficult examination. The quality of the classes held on ships was dependent upon the talents of the instructors and mostly the cadets gained experience through on-the-job training. On 8 August 1832, Maffitt was assigned to the *U.S.S. St. Louis*. For the next two years, Maffitt sailed the waters of the West Indies where he performed the duties of a seaman and also studied the duties of command to which he aspired. Maffitt's next assignment was to the Boston Navy Yard. On 18 September 1834, Maffitt reported to duty during the time of restoration of the *U.S.S. Constitution*. Maffitt was impressed by the *Constitution's* history and considered it fortunate to have been assigned to its first voyage after a lengthy restoration. On 16 March 1835, the *Constitution* sailed for Brest, France, to bring the American minister back to the United States. Maffitt and the *Constitution* sur-

vived two gales and successfully performed their assigned duties. Brest, France, was to become a future port of call for Maffitt and another historic ship.

The *Constitution* next sailed on a three year cruise (1835-1838) as the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. Maffitt took advantage of the *Constitution's* numerous ports of calls. He inspected the remains of ancient civilizations and attended balls and parties given by local aristocrats. On 15 June 1837, a memorable visit by the King and Queen of Greece revealed another of Maffitt's talents: his ability to charm the fairer sex. As aide to Commodore Jesse D. Elliott, Maffitt received the duty to escort the royal party from shore. Bedecked in his full dress uniform, Maffitt cut an impressive figure as his features were framed by high collar, gold lace, and cocked hat. Maffitt helped the queen to her seat and gallantly draped his blue cloak around her shoulders as protection from the damp spray from the oars. Commodore Elliott turned out his band on the quarter-deck and ordered that waltzes be played for their guests. Queen Amalie was quite taken with the music. Elliott recounted:

I could read in her eyes, "Do let's waltz..." I reckoned for one of my aides, Midshipman Maffitt, son of Rev. John N. Maffitt, who was quite adept at the business, presented him to the Queen, stepped aside, and motioned to him to be off. He did so, and in less than thirty minutes at least twenty couples, including the King, were whirling upon the deck to their hearts' content.... The dance continued until two o'clock in the morning, when the King proposed being taken on shore. ... Before leaving the ship, the Queen remarked to Mr. Maffitt that she would give a return ball on shore, at the same time extending an invitation to him.

Elliott refused Maffitt permission to attend the queen's ball because of the hurt that would befall the feelings of the other young officers when they were not invited. This instance was not the last where Maffitt called on his Irish charms. Maffitt recounted his experiences of this Mediterranean voyage when he wrote *Nautilus: Or Cruising Under Canvas* in 1872.

During March, 1838, Maffitt's probationary period as midshipman ended. He was ordered back to the United States and sailed on the *U.S.S. Shark*. During the voyage to Norfolk, Maffitt showed himself to be efficient in his duties. Trouble developed when the crew gained entry to the storeroom and its supply of spirits. Maffitt stopped the difficulties when he went among the drunken crew and secured the ring-leaders. Maffitt showed energy and quickness in quelling insubordination; traits that he used many times during his naval career.

Upon the *Shark's* return to Norfolk, Maffitt received a leave of three months to prepare for his examination. On 23 June 1838, Maffitt appeared before a board of senior officers to answer questions that would determine his future. Many midshipmen had college educations; however, Maffitt's education at sea had prepared him for the difficult questions of the board. On this date, Maffitt was passed as a midshipman in the United States Navy. He was

19 years old.

Maffitt saw duty aboard the *U.S.S. Vandalia* stationed out of Pensacola, Florida. He attained the acting rank of lieutenant on 11 March 1839 when another officer was blown overboard during a storm. Maffitt learned in his new assignment. He transferred to the *U.S.S. Macedonian* in October 1839 and again sailed in the Gulf of Mexico. While detached from the *Macedonian* in October 1840, Maffitt met Mary Florence Murrell from Mobile. On 17 November 1840, they were married in Mobile. This was the first of three marriages and eight children for Maffitt. He changed ships and marriages during the next 46 years and Maffitt charmed them all.

On 20 April 1842, Maffitt began service that would eventually bring him to the Wilmington area. The U.S. Coast Survey was attached to the Treasury Department; however, it was considered a normal but short tour of duty from the regular navy. Maffitt's mathematical skills made him an ideal officer for this exacting work. He performed the sounding and triangulation tasks so successfully that Alexander D. Bache, superintendent of the Coast Survey, blocked Maffitt's attempt to gain transfer to the fighting navy during the War with Mexico. This was a major turn in Maffitt's career. Bache explained: "I have upon my own responsibility, and from grounds of public duty, interfered to prevent his detachment from the Coast Survey ... His qualifications for this work are so peculiar, that I should not have felt justified in doing otherwise."

On 8 February 1848, Maffitt was appointed chief of a hydrographic party and to the command of his first ship, the Coast Survey schooner *U.S.S. Gallatin*. Maffitt

excelled as a surveying officer as he mapped the Atlantic coast. Coast Survey reports revealed that Maffitt was involved in surveys of: Nantucket shoals, Boston harbor, New Bedford, Cape Hatteras, Cape Fear, Beaufort harbor, St. Mary's River, Charleston harbor, Georgetown, Edisto harbor, the James River, and the Gulf Stream. His efforts greatly benefited commercial maritime and navy interests. Maffitt used the knowledge gained by his work to great advantage in the coming years.

During the ten year period from 1848 to 1858, Maffitt and his hydrographic crew worked and lived at Smithville, Charleston, Georgetown, Savannah, James River, and Washington City. Maffitt commanded the *U.S.S. Gallatin*, the *U.S.S. Crawford*, and the *U.S.S. Legare*. His service in the Coast Survey was demanding but rewarding. Maffitt was recognized for his contributions to maritime commerce by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce. The chamber president, George A. Trenholm, held a public appreciation dinner to honor Maffitt. Trenholm was to enter into Maffitt's life again in 1862. Professional praise also came to Maffitt when Superintendent Bache reported that the work of Maffitt exceeded that of any other member of the Coast Survey. Maffitt's years with the Coast Survey were not viewed so fairly by the Navy Department. Scientific duty was not viewed as an equal to man-of-war duty in the navy. On 14 September 1855, a Naval Efficiency Board placed Maffitt on indefinite furlough list that could result in his forced retirement from the navy. As



John Newland Maffitt

Maffitt was to do in future years, he would fight against heavy odds. When a Court of Inquiry met in Washington on 6 July 1857, Maffitt mounted his own defense. Maffitt called upon a long list of testimony from fellow officers. These officers and Maffitt presented Maffitt's long service on a ship by ship basis that impressively showed him "professionally, physically, morally, and mentally fit for naval service." On 29 January 1858, he was officially restored to rank and grade. Maffitt's years on the Coast Survey had almost ended his naval career; however, the period provided him with knowledge and experience that would stand him well in the coming years.

Maffitt next commanded the *U.S.S. Dolphin*. The mission of the *Dolphin* was protection of American commerce and suppression of slave trade on the Cuban station. Maffitt gained national attention when in August 1858; he captured the clipper ship, *Echo*, and a cargo of 300 African slaves. The press had a field day when the *Echo* and the blacks reached Charleston and were turned over to the U.S. Marshal. Northerners feared the Southerners would use the incident to reestablish slave trade. These fears proved groundless as Maffitt's efforts created great interest in the navy to intercept slave ships. On 11 June 1859, Maffitt assumed command of the larger screw steamer, *U.S.S. Crusader*. His assignment was again the suppression of slave trade. The *Crusader* intercepted the bark *Bogata* and its cargo of between four and five hundred blacks. Maffitt remained on duty at the Cuban station until 7 November 1860. His service during this period was reported by the *Wilmington Daily Journal* on 25 September 1863: "for those who maintain that the civil war in America is founded upon the slave question, that (Maffitt) should be the very man who has distinguished himself actively against the slave trade."

Abraham Lincoln was elected in November 1860. The navy and the entire nation were beset with a period of great drama. Maffitt remained true to his duties as he commanded the *Crusader* to protect the United States property along the southern coast. In Mobile during early January 1861, Maffitt defiantly proclaimed that any hostile attempts by local citizens to seize the *Crusader* would be met with force. The *Crusader* was ordered to Key West; however, Isaac Toucey, Secretary of the Navy, was concerned that Maffitt, as southern officer, would not continue with his duties. Maffitt arrived in Key West on 11 January 1861, the day after Florida seceded, and he assisted in securing federal property. Maffitt assisted Captain Montgomery C. Meigs in arming Fort Jefferson at Dry Tortugas. He provided sailors from the *Crusader* to help garrison both Fort Jefferson and Fort Taylor (Key West). Maffitt's actions secured these forts and established the terminus for the future Federal blockade of Florida and the Gulf coast.

In spite of Maffitt's actions in defending the Federal forts, Secretary Toucey viewed Maffitt with increased suspicion. Maffitt and the *Crusader* were ordered to New York. In a strange twist, Maffitt sailed to Havana to secure funds through the U.S. Consulate to supply for the voyage. Havana was a pro-Southern city and funding was not obtained; however, Maffitt advanced his personal funds to pay for his final voyage as a Federal officer. On 1 March 1861, he arrived in New York where he relinquished command of the *Crusader*. Maffitt travelled to his home in Washington City where he attempted to settle the ship's accounts. Federal auditors refused to settle the advance. The Fort Sumter

events of 12 April 1861 roused many Southerners to make the decision to join their states. Maffitt submitted his resignation to the United States Navy on 28 April 1861. He slipped out of Washington with his destination as Montgomery, Alabama. Maffitt made the emotional decision to leave his 30 year career with the United States Navy and embark on a new adventure. Maffitt was also in a difficult personal position because he owned substantial property in Washington that he was unable to ship south or to sell. Maffitt committed his life and property to a new nation but his mother's financial resolve remained evident in the son.

Former United States Navy lieutenant Maffitt made his way to Montgomery where he offered his services to the Confederate States Navy. The situation in Montgomery revealed to Maffitt that the leaders had little interest in a Confederate Navy. Jefferson Davis believed that Southern independence would be gained without a war. Maffitt interviewed with President Davis and heard that it was unnecessary for the South to spend funds for a navy. Maffitt reported that: "The government instantly seemed to be at sea, without rudder, compass, or charts by which to steer upon a bewildering ocean of absolute necessity." Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Navy, greeted Maffitt with even less enthusiasm. Mallory had been the chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Naval Affairs and was the chief supporter of the Naval Efficiency Board that had attempted to dismiss Maffitt from the navy in 1855. Mallory failed to offer Maffitt a position in the Confederate Navy; hence, Maffitt began packing to take his services to Europe. Cooler heads prevailed and President Davis sent a delegation, including Robert Toombs, with the request that Maffitt remain in the Confederacy. Effective 8 May 1861, Davis signed Maffitt's appointment as a Lieutenant in the Confederate Navy. Maffitt's initial contact with the Confederate leaders led him to comment: "The greatest mistake of the South was neglecting her Navy."

Maffitt initially saw service with Captain Josiah Tattnail as commander of the *C.S.S. Savannah*. His first action was against the Federal fleet that had steamed south to secure a base of operations at Port Royal, South Carolina. Maffitt rashly took the two gunned *Savannah* against the combined two hundred and fifteen guns of Captain Samuel F. Du Pont's fleet. The *Savannah* was damaged by Federal fire and Maffitt was forced to beach the ship to make repairs. Tattnail had gone ashore to consult with Confederate Army commanders and had instructed Maffitt to stay at anchor. Maffitt related that he had heard that the enemy be allowed to make no sounding that would aid their landing at Port Royal. This disagreement resulted in Maffitt's suspension from command of the *Savannah*. After harsh words, Maffitt "expressed his regards" and Tattnail recanted the suspension. Maffitt's first Confederate command ended with his transfer as naval aide to General Robert E. Lee. Maffitt's actions reflected the characteristics that he was to show many times during the war: plenty of backbone, love of adventure, and the absence of fear.

After a temporary service with Lee working on defense positions, Maffitt's Coast Survey knowledge of the southeastern coastline made his presence required elsewhere. As the Federal blockade was becoming more effective during 1862, enterprising individuals determined to increase the flow of supplies into the Confederacy. George A. Trenholm, the former president of the

Charleston Chamber of Commerce, was the president of the Fraser, Trenholm and Company. This company was the largest shipping concern in Charleston, and it also had operations in Liverpool, England. Trenholm suggested to Secretary of War, Benjamin P. Judah, that Maffitt be placed in charge of Confederate blockade running in Nassau. Trenholm had recognized the need to transfer supplies from large ships at Nassau and Bermuda onto smaller, shallow draft vessels that could slip through the blockade and into Southerner ports. Trenholm did not wait for action from Benjamin but determined to move forward with his plan. Both for commercial profits and patriotic reasons, Trenholm offered to use the *Cecile* and the *Kate* to transship supplies from Nassau to Mosquito Inlet at New Smyrna, Florida.

On 7 January 1862, Maffitt was ordered to the command of the blockade runner *Cecile*. This was the beginning of the career for which John Newland Maffitt was ideally suited. The *Cecile* was a passenger ship that had steamed the waters between Charleston and Fernandina. The 360-ton side-wheeler was loaded with 300 bales of cotton and departed Charleston on 20 February 1862 for Nassau. Maffitt oversaw the transshipment of Enfield rifles and other supplies to the *Cecile* and the *Kate*. Maffitt departed for Mosquito Inlet on 2 March 1862. The *Kate* followed after a two or three day interval. The vessels off-loaded their supplies and within days returned to Nassau. The Federal capture of Jacksonville closed down the New Smyrna operations; however, this voyage completed Maffitt's first run as a blockade runner. By spring, 1862, Wilmington and Charleston were the only east coast ports opened to the runners. Maffitt made several runs between Nassau and Wilmington as commander of the *Cecile*. While the voyage to Mosquito Inlet had been uneventful, Wilmington presented a test of skill where Maffitt required nerves of steel.

As the *Cecile* approached New Inlet, Maffitt's path was blocked by two vessels and *Cecile* was ordered to come to a stop or be fired upon. The Federal ships fired flares that illuminated the darkness and exposed the shadowy form of the *Cecile*. Maffitt responded to the stern order with an "Aye, Aye, sir!" His voice was calm and controlled. When the Federals announced that Maffitt should prepare to receive their boats, Maffitt shouted into the speaking tube to his engineer, "Full speed ahead! Open your throttle wide! Give her all you've got. We're running for it!" The *Cecile* surged forward and slipped between the Federal ships as explosions rocked the night. The Federal shots were high and only the riggings were damaged. Maffitt later wrote in his journal, "We paused not recklessly, but at a rate of sixteen knots absolutely flew out of unhealthy company, who discourteously followed us with exploding shells...." The *Cecile* had crossed the bar and entered the friendly waters of the Cape Fear River. The blue light from Fort Fisher's Mound Battery welcomed them into the Confederacy.

After voyages and escapes aboard the *Cecile*, Maffitt travelled to Richmond and conferred with the new Secretary of War, George W. Randolph. On 11 April 1862, Randolph ordered Maffitt to Nassau to assume duties that authorized him to control all vessels bound for the Confederacy. Maffitt departed for Nassau in command of the Confederate runner *Nassau*. Upon arrival in Nassau, Maffitt was greeted by John Low of the Confederate Navy. Low brought a proposition from Commodore James Bulloch, Confederate naval agent in England. Bulloch

offered Maffitt command of the *Oreto* which Low had sailed from Liverpool. The *Oreto* was the first commercial destroyer that Bulloch had succeeded in securing from English shipyards. Bulloch evaded United States protests, the British Foreign Enlistment Act, and spies hired by the U.S. Consul that tried to prevent the transition to Confederate raider. The intrigue that surrounded the construction of the ship was remarkable. The fate that awaited Maffitt as commander of the *Oreto* was equally as daring. The *Oreto* became the *C.S.S. Florida* and its decks became the stage upon which Maffitt played his most famous role as a Confederate naval officer.

Mallory instructed Maffitt to assume command on 7 June 1862, when the *Bahama* arrived in Nassau sans Mallory's choice, James North. After an exhaustive effort to secure release of the *Oreto* from the British government's Foreign Enlistment Act seizure and to evade the *U.S.S. R.R. Cuyler*, Maffitt slipped out of the harbor and rendezvoused with his supply ship, *Prince Albert*. On 9 August, the *Oreto* and the *Prince Albert* anchored off Green Key 90 miles south of Nassau. With a crew deficient of officers and sailors, Maffitt transferred two seven-inch pivots, six six-inch side guns, munitions and supplies to the *Oreto*. The hard labor required of all officers and men lasted a week. One crewman died during the efforts. Maffitt had uneasiness over the yellow appearance of the seaman as he was buried on Green Key. An earlier outbreak of yellow fever in Nassau would have consequence for the *Oreto*.

On 17 August 1862, Maffitt steamed out the key and cleared the Bahamas. He called the men on deck, hauled down the British flag, and raised the Stars and Bars. Maffitt re-christened the vessel as *C.S.S. Florida*, in honor of Secretary Mallory's home state. Mallory's orders for the *Florida* were read to the crew: "You will cruise at discretion, the department being unwilling to circumscribe your movements in this regard by specific instructions ... You are to do the enemy's commerce the greatest injury in the shortest time." Maffitt began the process of ensuring that *Florida* became an efficient cruiser. In the haste to secure supplies for the *Prince Albert*, essential artillery sights, rammers, and sponges were forgotten. The cruiser was defenseless. Yellow fever appeared among the crew. With his already reduced crew, Maffitt set course for Cuba and medical assistance. Maffitt acted as ship doctor and tended the crew.

The *Florida* reached Cardenas, Cuba on 19 August. Maffitt sent an officer ashore to alert the Cuban authorities to their plight and to contact Confederate agent, Charles J. Helms. Maffitt requested that Helms obtain additional crew and a physician. On the 22d, Maffitt was seized by violent chills and he slipped into unconsciousness. He regained consciousness on the 29th and heard a doctor say that Maffitt would be dead by noon. Maffitt informed the doctor that "I have too much to do, and cannot afford to die." From that time forward, Maffitt improved in his condition. On 31 August, the *Florida* left Cardenas for the protection of the Spanish guns at Havana. Unable to recruit a crew, Maffitt determined to steam to the Southern port of Mobile. The longer the *Florida* delayed in Cuba, the more numerous the Federal warships.

On 4 September, Maffitt defied all odds by making a daylight run into Mobile Bay past three Federal warships. The *Florida* was severely damaged but Maffitt's gamble got the ship and its weakened crew into a safe port. Maffitt noted "1400 shrapnell

shot in our hull, and our masts were pitted like a case of small-pox. We were torn to pieces.” The *Florida* would be quarantined until September 30; however, Maffitt and the crew did receive assistance from Admiral Franklin Buchanan in their efforts to restore the ship. The bravery of the crew and especially its commander would attract additional officers and sailors. During the repairs, Mallory tried to replace Maffitt as commander of the *Florida*. Admiral Buchanan intervened directly with President Davis to save Maffitt’s command. Davis counter-manned Mallory’s order: “Maffitt brought her in gallantly and he will take her out.”

The *Florida* remained in Mobile for four months. During this time, Maffitt saw to repairs to the ship, replaced ineffective officers, and enlisted and trained a new crew. On 11 January 1863, Maffitt steamed the *Florida* out Mobile Bay, anchored off Fort Morgan, and waited for bad weather to cover his escape. The Federal fleet consisted of three ships in September had grown to thirteen in January. Maffitt waited for a violent storm and on the evening of 15 January the worsened conditions of a norther erupted to limit visibility. Maffitt waited until 2:00 a.m. and headed for the bar. The *Florida* buffed its way past several Federal ships. Only the fast *U.S.S. R.R. Cuyler* realized the ship among them was not another Federal warship. The *Cuyler* picked up the chase and closed the range on the *Florida*. Maffitt used the approaching darkness to elude the *Cuyler* and gain the open seas.

From 15 January until 23 August 1863, the *Florida* waged commercial war on the Union’s high seas commerce. Maffitt exhibited daring and skill during the *Florida*’s first voyage. The *Florida* ranged the ocean from Mobile, north to the New York coast, south to Brazil, and east to Brest, France. Maffitt and his resourceful crew captured 23 ships with an estimated value in excess of \$3,727,000. By the time the *Florida* put into Brest for needed repairs, Maffitt’s health was broken and he was replaced by Commander Joseph N. Barney.

With his health improved by the end of 1863, Maffitt conferred with Bulloch in England. The South was no longer allowed to purchase warships from English yards; however, swift blockade runners were available for purchase. These Clyde-built steamers were needed to run the tightening blockade around Wilmington. State governments, companies, and individuals purchased these fast ships to reap the rewards on the white gold (cotton) trade. The Confederacy needed men like Maffitt with the daring and skills needed to supply the provisions to continue the struggle. On 5 June 1864, Maffitt made his return to Wilmington in command of the blockade runner *Lilian*. This was the first time Maffitt was on Southern soil since he left Mobile in January 1863. As ordered on improvement in his health, Maffitt reported to the Navy Department in Richmond.

The Confederate ironclad *Albemarle* aided in the Confederate recapture of Plymouth, North Carolina. Commander James W. Cooke declined in health during the campaign and he requested to be relieved from the *Albemarle*. On 9 June 1864, Maffitt was ordered to Plymouth to assume command. Maffitt reported for duty on June 25, and word of his presence quickly reached the Brigadier General Innis N. Palmer, Federal commander in New Bern. Palmer wrote: “Captain Maffitt now commands the ram *Albemarle*, and we all know that he is not the man to sit down at Plymouth. He was ordered there to do something and if he gets a fleet of these iron rams before we receive any iron vessels we

must expect disaster.”

Mallory had sent Maffitt to Plymouth with orders to attack the enemy’s ships in the Albemarle Sound. During this period of repairs to the *Albemarle*, a political battle ensued between Cooke and Army commanders in the area and Mallory over uses of the *Albemarle* in protecting the gains so far made by the ram. Maffitt was always an aggressive fighter that backed down from few occasions to wage battle. He organized a raid to capture and burn the Federal mail boat *Fawn*. The raid was successful but when the raiders returned the Plymouth on 9 September, they learned that Maffitt had been relieved from the *Albemarle*. Maffitt received orders to take command of the blockade runner *Owl*. Politics won out over aggressive action.

Maffitt’s final command was one of the fast vessels that were built in British shipyards under Bullock’s supervision. The *Owl* arrived in Wilmington on 19 September 1864. The 771-ton side-wheeler was 230 feet long and was capable of 16 knots. The ship had a cargo capacity of 800 bales of cotton. The cargo space on the *Owl* was assigned entirely to government needs. Mallory again gave Maffitt specific orders that included specific instruction not to surrender his ship. On 21 December 1864, Maffitt escaped the blockade loaded with 800 bales of cotton. Maffitt arrived in St. George’s on 27 December. Maffitt received word that the *Butler* attack on Fort Fisher failed; hence, he started the return voyage. On 16 January 1865, the *Owl* crossed the bar at Old Inlet about 8:00 p.m. Maffitt anchored off Fort Caswell. Confederates rowed out to the *Owl* and reported that Fort Fisher was in Federal hands. The war not yet over for Maffitt for it was still his duty to get his cargo to the Confederacy. Maffitt attempted to enter Charleston but was unsuccessful. Maffitt made the last blockade runner delivery of the war when he succeeded in getting into the port at Galveston. He delivered his cargo, ran the blockade, and made Havana by 9 May 1865. The war was now over; Maffitt heeded Mallory’s advice and saved his ship. On 14 July 1865, the *Owl* anchored in Liverpool. Maffitt attended his duty and paid his remaining sailors for their services. The career of a Confederate blockade runner ended in the Mersey River.

Maffitt never recovered from the financial losses that resulted from his property seizure by the United States Government. He lived for a while in England and worked in the British merchant marine. He returned to the United States in 1867 and made his way to his family in Wilmington. He was involved in some naval activities but mostly lived on his small farm outside of Wilmington. Business and personal losses mounted for Maffitt. The years of dangerous and stressful living took its toll of his health. In 1885, President Grover Cleveland failed to approve Maffitt’s nomination to the Custom House in Wilmington. Maffitt’s health further declined. On 15 May 1886, Maffitt “slipped the mortal cable.”

*“Whether sailor or not, for a moment avast!  
Poor Jack’s mizzentopsail is hove to the mast;  
He’s now all a wreck, nor will sail shoot ahead;  
His cruise is done up: he’ll no more heave the lead.”*

John N. Maffitt did his duty. He lived up to an ideal of his former commander, R.E. Lee: “Duty then is the sublimest word in the English language. You should do your duty in all things. You can never do more, you should never wish to do less.”

# Sanford's National Guard Unit

## *A brief history — from its beginning to 1980*

By LTC (Ret.) Sion H. Harrington III

*INTRODUCTION: My interest in the martial history of the Sanford and Lee County area of North Carolina comes naturally. My ancestral roots run deep in southern Lee County and western Harnett County, the primary areas from which the various Sanford units of the North Carolina National Guard have been recruited. I had the honor of serving in Sanford's Company B, 2d Battalion, 252d Armor, N.C. National Guard, as a tank platoon leader from 1977-1980, and will never forget the fine soldiers there who taught me how to be a proper officer.*

The military heritage of the greater Sanford area dates back over two hundred years. There has been at least one militia company in the area since before the American Revolution. During both the War of 1812 and Mexican War men of the area's militia responded to the call for volunteers. The War Between the States saw several companies of Confederate soldiers raised in this part of old northern Moore County that in 1907 became Lee County.

When America entered the First World War in April of 1917, men from the greater Sanford area again flocked to the colors, serving in General John J. Pershing's American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) that helped defeat the Germans in France and Belgium.

Following the Great War it was natural for the people in the area surrounding Sanford to talk once again of forming a military company. The persistence and patriotism of the area's people was rewarded by the State Adjutant General's transfer of Battery A, 113th Field Artillery, from Goldsboro to Sanford in the Spring of 1928. With the completion of recruiting, the unit, under the command of Captain Dan B. King, received its federal recognition on 28 April 1928. Though newly organized and woefully inexperienced in the science of field artillery, the unit attended its first annual training period (summer camp) in the Summer of 1928. The hard work and willingness to learn exhibited by the officers and enlisted men of the battery were recognized in a letter of commendation from their regimental commander. Just after completing their first annual training session, the battery was redesignated Battery E, 2d Battalion, 113th Field Artillery.

The 113th Field Artillery had originally been raised in July 1917 for service in the First World War. After training at Camp Sevier, South Carolina, the unit sailed for England in May 1918. Following its arrival in France, the 113th spent 78 days in combat. They remained as occupation troops until March 1919 when they returned to Camp Jackson, South Carolina, and demobilized. Reorganized as the 117th Field Artillery of the National Guard in 1924, it was redesignated the 113th Field Artillery in 1927.

The next decade was one of challenge and change for Battery E. The Great Depression of the 1930s placed severe restrictions on training funds for the National Guard at a time when world events foreshadowed the coming of a major military calamity. The Sanford unit redoubled its efforts to maintain a high standard of training and readiness while often having to "make do" with less in the way of equipment than was actually needed.

By the Spring of 1940 it was evident that the United States would not be able to maintain her neutrality indefinitely, and there was a real military threat to her security not far down the

road. Congress passed a bill in the Fall of 1940 initiating the first peace-time draft (Selective Service) in American history. As a further step toward upgrading the nation's war posture, Congress called for the activation of the National Guard for a period of 12 months active duty training. The call-up was to be carried out in a series of increments over a 13-month period. President Roosevelt's Executive Order Number 8530, dated 31 August 1940 called for the first increment to report on 16 September 1940.

Among the first four major units in the nation to be called to active duty was the 30th Infantry Division, which included the 252d Coast Artillery Regiment (155mm) which was made up of Guardsmen from North and South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia. The 30th Infantry Division was ordered to mobilize at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The 252d Coast Artillery Regiment, the lineal ancestor of Sanford's unit in 1980 (Company B, 2d Battalion, 252d Armor) was ordered to report to Fort Screven, Georgia.

Executive Order Number 1, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, dated 10 September 1940, directed Governor Clyde R. Hoey to turn over all Guard units and personnel to the U.S. Army. The N.C. National Guard was federalized "for the period of 12 months or until such time as relieved by proper authority." The order took effect at midnight on 15/16 September 1940.

At 8 o'clock on the morning of 16 September 1940, Sanford National Guardsmen reported to the downtown armory and began to set up squad tents. In many areas the massive call-up created temporary problems due to shortages of everything from rations to sleeping quarters, and even uniforms. The latter shortage can be partially explained by the fact that many men had hurriedly joined the ranks in order to fill gaps created by those discharged either for medical reasons or to avoid undue hardship to families. Many had not yet been issued military clothing.

The year of training at Fort Jackson was to be of value sooner than anyone had ever dreamed. Many Guard units were still engaged in their 12-month training period when news came of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and our subsequent entry into World War II.

February 1942 found Sanford's Guard unit on active duty at Fort Jackson, but this time with a new name. When the 30th Infantry Division was "triangulated" from four to three infantry regiments in 1942, the 113th Field Artillery was transferred and became a part of the 196th Field Artillery Regiment (Separate). Training continued at Fort Jackson until 23 August 1942 when the unit moved to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for use as school troops. 25 February 1943 brought another change in title. The 196th Field Artillery Regiment became the 196th Field Artillery Group with the 2d Battalion of the 113th becoming the 690th Field Artillery Battalion. Sanford's Battery E became Battery B.

From June 1943 through early February 1944 pre-combat training was conducted at Camp Gordon, Georgia. The long awaited day of embarkation arrived on 11 February 1944 when

the battalion sailed from New York to Greenock, Scotland, landing 22 February. The unit moved to Camp Sudbury in Monmouthshire, England, on 26 February and trained there until the end of April. The next seven weeks were spent at Ludlow Park, Shropshire, England, in further preparation for movement into the Larkstoke Concentration Area. On 3 July, the battalion left for the cross-channel marshaling area at Romsey, Hampshire, England. Four days later they set sail from Southampton for France and combat.

The next day, 8 July 1944, Sanford's Battery B, along with some Headquarters personnel, were the first men from their battalion to land on Omaha Beach. The remainder of the 690th Battalion was ashore and in the bivouac area by 14 July. It did not take long for the eager artillerymen to see action, for at 2020 hours on 14 July 1944 the unit fired its first round into enemy held territory. It was the first of many shells expended by the 690th Field Artillery Battalion during its tour in the ETO.

The unit's first offensive action came with its participation in the destruction of the German forces during the American breakthrough at St. Lo and the reduction of the Falaise Pocket. From July through August the unit advanced across northern France, fighting all the way, entering Belgium on 2 September. 8 September through 2 October found the battalion in bivouac near the French-Belgian border with its drivers and vehicles detailed to haul critical supplies 24 hours a day for the "Red Ball Express."

The battalion transport section performed this vital service until 17 October when the Army changed the 690th Battalion's mission from artillery fire support to that of security police, the first in the European Theater, in the occupied German town of Aachen. From 23 October until mid-December the battalion, divided into security platoons for patrol purposes, maintained order, guarded important military installations, and handled Prisoners of War (POW) in Aachen and the nearby village of Eilendorf. During German Field Marshall von Rundstedt's December offensive, which created the famous "Bulge," the 690th Battalion engaged in the defense of the Aachen area.

Advancing behind the VII Corps from February through April 1945, the 690th Battalion performed security police work in many small towns from Aachen to the Rhine River. The end of the war found Battery B of the 690th Battalion occupying the town of Halle, near Leipzig, Germany.

In its 14½ months in Europe the 690th Battalion performed yeoman service in the fields of artillery, transport, and military security. Few of the Sanford unit's original members were listed

on the roster in 1945. One name that had been on the list since the unit's first mobilization was that of Lucian P. Wilkins, who began his service as a First Lieutenant commanding Battery E and ended the war as the Battalion Executive and Staff Administrative Officer with the rank of Major.

Since the end of the Second World War, Sanford's Guard unit has had several different unit designations and missions. In June 1948 it became Battery C, 252d Coast Artillery (Anti-Aircraft). One year later the unit became Battery C, 130th Anti-Aircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons, Self-Propelled), but it never received the self-propelled guns to replace their truck-towed ones. In 1954 the battery was re-designated as the 30th Reconnaissance Company, followed four years later by a change to Troop A, 1st Squadron, 196th Cavalry. The latter change marked the first time the unit operated as a tank company. In 1968 the designation changed again to Company B, 2d Battalion, 252d Armor.

In 1975 the unit was selected to be a "round-out" battalion for the 1st Cavalry Division stationed in Fort Hood, Texas. The new "round-out" status brought with it short-lived permission to wear the black beret, traditional headgear of tankers in many parts of the world, as well as a black leather belt with oval brass "US" buckle, just like the active duty component members of the Division at Fort Hood. The accoutrements were worn with considerable pride. The 1st Cavalry Division affiliation placed high demands for increased equipment and personnel readiness on the Guard unit, for the mission it received was an important one. If the 1st Cavalry Division deployed to a combat zone, the men of the Sanford Guard unit be deploying on short notice with them.

The National Guard company in Sanford entered the decade of the 1980s as a fiercely proud organization possessing high morale and a special brand of esprit de corps that only members of highly trained, competent, and confident military units feel. In the last three decades it witnessed many historic events including the demise of Communism in the Soviet Union, the destruction of the Berlin Wall, and an upswing in global terrorism. But, if the personnel who now fill the ranks of "Sanford's Own" are the troops I think they are, we will see more great things from this fine old unit in years to come.

*It is my hope that this brief sketch will inspire others to record the history of other North Carolina units, whether ones in their own local areas, or perhaps units in which they simply have a particular interest, regardless of the time period in which they served. And, once compiled and written, that the information will be preserved and shared with others, especially via the vehicle of Recall, the official publication of the North Carolina Military Historical Society.*

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# EDITOR'S TACK ROOM

By Richard M. Ripley

This edition of the Fall 2009 *Recall* completes our publication for this year. I want to thank the authors who contributed their excellent stories this year. Without their loyal efforts *Recall* would not be possible.

Also, I am happy to commend Barrie Davis, World War II P-51 Fighter Ace, for the publication of *Recall*. I give him draft



form stories and photos. He takes what ever I give him and very professionally converts it to final form and delivers it to our printer. He has freely contributed his time and expertise for many years. I believe he and I started *Recall* in May 1995 when I became Editor. Bottom line, we could not afford the expense if we had to pay him what a printing company would normally charge for his work.

We continue to seek stories, *Recall's* lifeblood. I know that you are aware of someone who has military experience that deserves to be recorded in a story before it is lost. If you cannot write an article, perhaps you know someone who can write one. We need, in particular, some stories on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Before closing, I would like to share a small poem I made up during the summer of 1944 while we were moving across France.

*Into battle went a hundred men  
And ninety-nine came back again.  
The losses today are light, the Newsmen said,  
Light, except to the man who did not come back.*

We celebrated Veterans' Day on November 11. I have a feeling that it has taken on a more special meaning in recent years. Freedom is not free.

## Photos, Interviews Sought

In 1998, the N.C. Division of Archives and History began Phase III of its effort to better document the state's 20th century military experience. Previous phases have focused on the period from 1900 through the end of the Korean War. Though still actively collecting and preserving items from this era, the Archives is seeking to honor North Carolina veterans who served North Carolina and the nation from 1954 through the present.

The Military History Collection Project also is engaged in an extensive oral history program. People around the state are encouraged to tape interviews with veterans of all time periods and services for deposit in the Military Collection of the State Archives. If you have items to share, please mail them to or contact: Sion Harrington III, Coordinator, Military Collection Project, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, N.C. 27601-2807; or call 919-807-7314. E-mail: sion.harrington@ncmail.net.

## Contribute Articles to Recall

Readers are invited to submit material to *Recall*. In choosing material for publication, the editor of *Recall* will give preference to articles of unusual significance and transcripts or abstracts of difficult-to-locate records. Material submitted for publication will be reviewed by persons knowledgeable in the areas covered for validity, significance, and appropriateness. All material will be edited for clarity and conciseness. Manuscripts should be sent to the Editor, 4404 Leota Drive, Raleigh, N.C. 27603. Tel. 919-772-7688. E-mail: rripley@nc.rr.com.

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