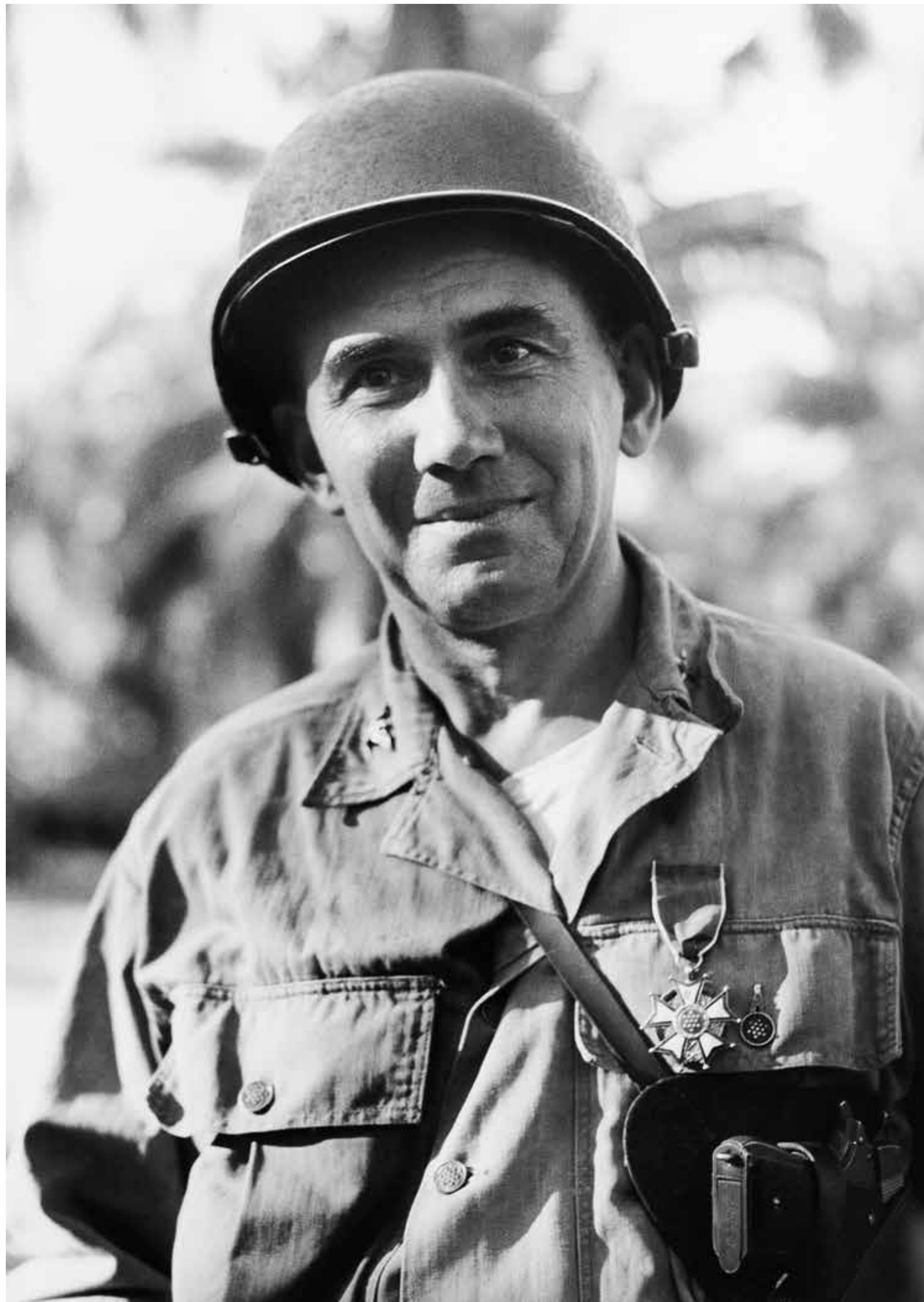
AN ACCOUNT OF THE BOUGAINVILLE CAMPAIGN

By

Brigadier General Hugh M. Milton

Edited and Annotated by Martha Shipman Andrews

An Excerpt from General Milton's Recorded Memoirs



Colonel, later General, Hugh Milton in his combat gear wearing the Bronze Star awarded to him after the Battle of Bougainville

In 1924 Hugh M. Milton II, a native of Lexington, Kentucky, accepted a position as professor of Mechanical Engineering at the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. A popular and well-respected member of the faculty, he became Dean of Engineering in 1933 and was named president of the College in 1938, at a time of crisis for the institution, which had lost its accreditation.

During World War I, Milton had served as an enlisted man and, later, as a second lieutenant in the field artillery. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel on the staff of the 120th Engineers, New Mexico National Guard. During the College's accreditation difficulties, he resigned from the National Guard to devote his full energy to repairing the school's reputation. In December 1940, however, he was placed once again on the reserve list with an expectation that active duty would follow soon after. On September 18, 1941, he handed over his presidential duties to John W. Branson and reported to Fort Custer, Michigan, for assignment to the Army's Fifth Division in chemical warfare service. During the next four years Colonel Milton served with distinction as Chief of Staff to XIV Corps in the South Pacific, eventually rising to Brigadier General under General Douglas MacArthur with whom he participated in the retaking of the Philippines and the liberation of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps in and around Manila. He earned many decorations including the Legion of Merit and the Silver and Bronze stars. Following the war he returned briefly to resume the presidency of New Mexico A&M College but resigned again in 1947 to become president of New Mexico Military Institute. In 1951 General Milton received promotion to Major General and became Executive for Reserve and ROTC Affairs, Department of the Army. In 1953 President Eisenhower appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Army and later Under Secretary of the Army. In 1961 he retired and returned to Las Cruces where he was active in civic affairs until his death in January 1987.

Throughout the course of the war General Milton kept a diary and in his later years he began to record his memoirs on tape. In the Spring of 2009 the Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives of the New Mexico State University Library began a project to reformat General Milton's original reel-to-reel tapes onto CDs with the aim of making these important first-hand accounts of World War II actions and government service more easily accessible to researchers. The following extract from Reel 3: Side 2of his memoirs recounts General Milton's impressions of the Bougainville Campaign, his first combat assignment and one for which he would receive a Bronze Star. The account is particularly interesting because it is a true snapshot of the day-to-day reality of soldiering—days of tedious preparation, boredom, invented diversions such as the observation of termite teamwork followed by sudden, intense episodes of destruction and brutality. Tacitly, the stakes are always life or death in the midst of which comes the unexpected, humorous tableau of a dignified colonel biting the dust in the midst of an air raid only to find himself sharing space with an angry cockatoo.

[Editor's note: the following text is a transcription of a dictated memoir and not a draft of a written work. General Milton was gifted with strong oratorical skills and could tell a good story. He used his diary as a prompt for his recitation of events so his comments are unusually well-organized. However, oral histories are never a showplace for perfect grammar or sentence structure. In verbal expression, we all use more space fillers such as "of course" and begin more sentences with "Then" than we would in a formal paper. Brackets in the following text indicate insertions by the editor to clarify sentence structure. Bracketed queries indicate text that was inaudible or that could not be verified. Ellipses indicate the editor's decision to omit a sentence or passage from the transcript. All twenty-five discs of General Milton's memoirs are available to researchers at the Archives and Special Collections reading room on the fourth floor of Branson Library at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico.]

Leaving one's family is the hardest part of going to war. Having left Jo, Hugh, and John on Tuesday, December 28, having spent the Christmas at Palm Springs, I traveled with them as far as Tucson. They hated

General Milton's family. The writing on the phtoto says "To - Our Daddy Dear - with love, Hugh, Jo and John 12-25-1942"

saying goodbye; [it] was hard. I remember that I cried. I could not keep the tears back. The next three days I went back to Camp Young and spent in packing. On

January 2nd and 3rd time was spent at Camp Young and at Rancho Mirage near Palm Springs. On January 5th I left Camp Young and boarded the *Southern Pacific* and arrived in Los Angeles at noon. I had a terribly bad cold and was able to get rooms at the Biltmore. Jo's mother and father came down and had lunch with me and then we went out and I bought a trench coat and a rubber mattress, stopped by to see some members of the family, and left Los Angeles at 11:00 p.m., arriving at San Francisco at 7:00, January 7th. On January 8th I went to Fort Mason and checked in, had my physical, drew a pistol and a gas mask, went back to town and drew mileage and had an enchilada supper. The next day I enjoyed a show and on the 10th went to the port of embarkation at 1300 [hours] for the last check stop. There I met Ralph [?] from Las Cruces and he drove me back to the St. Francis Hotel. I went down and bought some stars for General Griswold[1] and for Duke Arnold and got me a trench knife. On the 11th I went back to Fort Mason and at 12:30 boarded the boat which was known as the *West Point* but formerly had

Lieutenant General Griswold, left, and Brigadier General Milton

been known as the *America*.

When I got on board I found that there was the Ninety-third Division[2] which I had put through maneuvers down on the desert with their commanding general still in command. I thought that I had left the Ninety-third for good but, no, there they were. My cabin was U-31 and I had three bunkmates. We cleared the Golden Gate at 12:45 and at 1500 [hours] or 3:00 as we normally call it, we were out of sight of land and started our first target practice. I found that the maximum capacity of the *West Point* was 12,000 people. However, we only had 9000 aboard. Not only was the Ninety-third Division—and some casuals—[aboard], but there were a lot of nurses and hospital people. We kept four men on the alert at all times looking for submarines. Two were on the forward [deck] and two of them were in the rear. On January the 17th at 1309 we crossed over the equator. We passed Christmas Island at 0800 on the 17th but we were 100 miles away and to the east and could not see land. I might here add that we had no escort on our trip but that we made a zigzag path changing at intervals—rather irregular, I should say—so that no submarine could get a line on just where we were. On January the 19th we were still out of sight of land. On board ship the lights go on—or went on—at 6:00 a.m. and at 6:30 to 7:30 water was turned on. From 7:30 to 9:30 we had breakfast and from 1630 to 1830 we had dinner. There was no lunch. Lights went out at 2100. On the 19th at 2100 our position was just east of Tonga[3] and I made a note in my diary that this date, January the 19th, was Hugh Junior's birthday. It is also the birth date of Robert E. Lee. On the 20th we had a very rough afternoon. The sea was terrible. However, we began to see some birds flying and we thought that we were close to land and no doubt we were. On January the 21st there was a day taken out of my life. This was a day that never existed. We crossed the international dateline at 2400 on Thursday, January the 20th, and at 2401 it was Saturday. Our position this time was just south of Tonga. This was my first ocean-going voyage and I truly enjoyed it. I had a lower bunk and I was able to do a tremendous amount of reading. At a later time I shall give a listing of the books which I read, not only in going over but throughout my entire campaign in the Southwest Pacific.

I remember, too, seeing the beautiful flying fishes that we first spotted on January the 22nd and at 1030 on that date an airplane flew over. It was very interesting that we got a radio report that the Japanese had said the USS *West Point* had been sunk on Tuesday last. But we were still afloat. Another very interesting thing that happened while we were on board was [an] appendectomy. They slowed the ship down to a very slow speed and conducted the operation which was very successful. On January the 23rd, which was Sunday, we had the services on board. There were two services simultaneously and both of them were well-attended. We expected to arrive at Nouméa, New Caledonia, tomorrow and we were told that we will wait

Map of the South Pacific

outside and that those going ashore will be lightered in[4]. On January the 24th, Monday, we sighted land at 0700. The waves were breaking on the barrier reef a mile or so off shore. There were two small ships that were stranded on the reef. We docked at 1100 and we had passed through the submarine net and thus we had completed a trip from San Francisco of 6,200 miles in twelve days. I remember going ashore on the lighter. (The lighters were nothing more than pontoons and they were afloat and pulled by a tug and we all got on the lighter—or the floats—and put our arms around one another so as to hold up [and] hold ourselves on. Thus, we got ashore.

I was very much impressed with Nouméa. It is a typical Western Pacific settlement built very much along the French pattern—reminds you of the French Quarters [sic] of New Orleans. The natives were large with kinky hair which is red at the end. I found this to be true of the natives of the Southwest Pacific. They tell me that they treat their hair, which is long and stands straight up on their heads, with some sort of clay that keeps the vermin down. At any rate they are very striking people. The Javanese and the Tonkinese which I saw were small and show a great deal of Japanese blood. But, they all dressed in vivid colors and then wear shorts and usually no shirts or shoes. People tell me that these Javanese and Tonkinese are indentured servants. They have been sold to the people of Nouméa and New Caledonia for a certain period of years. When that time is up, they go back home.

On Wednesday, January 26, 1944, we left Nouméa at 0630 [and] we headed north through the Coral Sea. Now, bear in mind that this is where the famous sea battle was fought.[5] Again, we had no escort except for one plane for just a few minutes after leaving the harbor. All day the sea was very quiet and no sight of land after 1500.

We continued sailing north on January the 27th but at noon on that date, we picked up two destroyers in the afternoon and an observation plane continued to cover us. The water is a different color here from what it was around Nouméa. It resembled a distorted glass and is a bluish purple. We had the last of our "abandon ship" calls. On the 27th at 7:00 in the morning we were sailing along the west coast of San Cristobal[6] and at 1000 we could see the Florida Islands[7] on our east and also see the east coast of Guadalcanal. We passed Tulagi[8] at 1055 and arrived at Tunga Beach [?] at 1400. At 1900 on that date—January the 28th 1944—I went ashore at Guadalcanal in an LCT.[9] It was a very rough ride and you know I spent the night in a casual camp and I never saw or heard as many rats as I experienced that night and the rest of the time that I was on Guadalcanal. I have heard of big rats but I really have seen them and in some cases they were as large as some small fox terrier dogs. Someone ought to write up a story of the rat traps on Guadalcanal. They [the rats] were so offensive that they would bite your toes at night. The boys had devised all sorts of means of exterminating them. In one case I know they had taken a tub of water and with slides and with cheese held out over the water by sticks so that Mr. Rat would go out on this slide reaching for the cheese and would slip and fall into the water. And, you were kept awake with the squealing rats swimming around in the water all night. Another device was to shoot pins at the rat. When he bit the cheese, he would release the string which threw the needle into the rat's heart. Another one was a hammer that was delicately suspended so that when the rat ate on the cheese, the spring was sprung and the rat was hit with [the] hammer. I'll tell you, the ingenuity of the American man when he has nothing to do but to think and devise schemes like this, is really beyond comprehension.

On Saturday, January the 29th, I went to visit the Tenaru River[10], which is known as "Hell's Point", which was quite famous in [the] Guadalcanal battle when General Patch was there.[11] I also went to the cemetery and found a beautiful chapel had been constructed there by the natives. The row upon row of white crosses makes one realize what a price was paid for this island.

My trunks had no yet arrived and, of course, it is always said that a soldier and his baggage are never separated but I was, on Guadalcanal. On Sunday, January the 30th, 1944, I left Guadalcanal at 0530 and flew to Bougainville. [We] landed at the Munda airstrip around 11:00, stopping at Munda for about one and a half hours. There had been a battle down on the Torokina which was one of the rivers on our Bougainville perimeter. This was in progress and General Griswold was down there watching the fight. However, General Arnold, Jack Blocker [?] and Ralph O. Gwyn [?] [12] were in the headquarters when I arrived and they immediately escorted me to my bunk which was a new one constructed especially for me. It was screen in and had a cot, of course, and a sort of rude chair. This is where I spent several months on the island of Bougainville.

Bougainville, as an island, is located on the map north of New Georgia. Prior to World War I [it] was a

Map of Bouganinville Operation from November 1943 through March 1944

German mandate[13] but after World War I, it had reverted to Australia and at the present moment was under their suzerainty. You can therefore expect that there might be some remnants of a German culture on this island. However, it was peopled by Melanesians and only [on one occasion] did we find that there were any Germans around. The Melanesians on the island of Bougainville were just about the lowest type of people I have ever seen. They were all diseased. I understand that the average length of their lives was about twenty-one years. They were eaten up with yaws.[14] A man could have as many wives as he could find pigs to trade for one and it was not unusual to see a man coming down the jungle path followed by three or four women and a string of children that would number ten, twelve, fifteen. They wore nothing except a loin cloth. After we had been there for a little bit and they had accustomed themselves to bathing—for they had seen our men bathe—they would go into the streams and bathe but never take the loin cloth off and would put the soap on the outside of the loin cloth… . These Melanesians lived in the roots of trees or sometimes in the tops of the trees. The breadfruit grows wild over there so that was one of their staples.

There was a marsupial that was known as a wombat which at night would cry. When it cried, it sounded very much like a baby crying. By the sound these natives would locate the tree in which the wombat was staying and then the next day they—one of them—would climb the tree and grab the wombat and throw it to the ground and it would be stunned. Then, those waiting on the ground would grab it. They'd knock its head against a rock and then they would tear it to pieces [into] raw meat and just eat it raw. It was a most repulsive sight to see. However, there was a great deal of family attachment demonstrated. I knew [one instance of an] old man who had two wives—one of them wasn't much older than the other—and he was very much attached to her. She had yaws on her feet and her legs. He was constantly wrapping them and washing them and taking care of her. However, one of the boys later told me that he tried to sell his wife to [a] soldier for two dollars. But, be that as it may, they were a very interesting people.

Quite in the distance to the east of our location was Mount Bagana and it was constantly in eruption. I don't think that in the months which I spend on Guadal-

Mount Bagana

canal—I mean, Bougainville—which was almost a year, that there was ever a day went by that we didn't have at least two and, most of the time, four or five earthquakes. Sometimes they were so severe—at night, particularly—they were so severe that you would have to wrap your legs around the foot of your bed in order to hang on. And, of course, the mountain was always in smoke, too. Many of the natives who came into our compound—of course, trying to get away from the Japanese [who] were all around us—came down from Mount Bagana. I know in one case one of the natives brought in a hen that had been setting. They brought her eggs along with her. They set the hen there in the compound and everyone of those eggs hatched. All my life I've heard that thunder would destroy setting eggs; but here was an island subject to earthquake and that old hen set on all those eggs. All of them hatched only to have the chickens devoured by the dogs of the American soldiers.

Another characteristic of the island which was very impressive was the amount of rainfall. I think we averaged twenty-six inches of rain per month during all the months that I was on the island. And, it usually started about three o'clock in the afternoon and continued for an hour and a half or two hours. It made it most difficult to maintain roads on the island. These are coral islands in the South Pacific and there's a lot of ash that accumulates, particularly ash from Mount Bagana which was constantly erupting. We used this for road materials. But, when these rains came, they would wash out the roads and it posed a tremendous problem. Now, another thing that is interesting in these islands is that the roots of the trees join the trunk, in some cases twenty three feet above the surface of the earth. That's easily understood where there is such intense rainfall the roots do not have to go deep into the ground and consequently the roots coming up [to] form the trunk ten, fifteen, twenty feet above the ground offered many hiding places for the enemy and also homes for the natives. I've mentioned before that many times they lived in the roots of the trees or sometimes in the tops of the trees. Most of these trees were known as banyan trees.

Also, I might note that the insects were terrific on this island and all others like it. So many of them were luminescent—at night, particularly. At one and two o'clock in the morning when you would awaken, the moths would be flying around and they would all be luminescent. You would find lizards that glowed at night and centipedes and, my goodness, the island was full of centipedes, some of which were eight and ten inches long. Then, of course, the wood which had fallen upon the ground was phosphorescent and it created a very, very eerie sight. Then, too, there was a snail that lived in the ocean and carried its shell with it. Along about midnight every night these snails would come out in millions. They would drag their shell behind them. As they would drag the shells over the coral reef it would sound like a regiment of Japs was right on top of you. Sometime between one and two o'clock in the morning and daybreak they would go back into the sea. Now, if you happened to capture any of them, which I did many times, and would try to grab them, they would go back in their shells and, in some cases, they had little doors they would pull in. These were highly valued. They were known as cat-eyes. If you would get one of those, you were considered quite lucky. I thought it would be nice to get some of these shells [to] send back to the boys. Of course, I knew that I would have to get the snails out of the shells first so I gathered many of them and put them in a candy box which Jo had sent to me filled with candy, of course. The walls of this candy box were maybe two inches high—tin, it was—and I put these shells with the snails in there. Now, also on the island there are these termites. I found great delight in my leisure moments of following the termite tunnels as they would go along the ground and up the sides of the tree. Many times I'd cut the tunnels and there would be millions of termites and very quickly the bruise which I had made in the tunnel would be repaired and everything was back to normal. Well, getting back now to

the snails and the shells, I put these snails in this tin box and as I would sit there and watch them, one of them would come out of its shell and I would grab it and pull it out. But, this was a very tiring job. Nevertheless, that's what I was doing when lo and behold, the first morning that I had this can—or box—of snails, I noticed the next morning that the termites had come and made a bridge up over the outside of the edge of the box and down on the inside. They were going into the shells of the snails and stinging the snails. Then, of course, the snail with the shell would move around and, after a while, it would remain still. I guess life was extinct. Then, these termites would go in and come out with pieces of meat in their mouths and [head] back over the bridge of termites over the edge of the box, mind you, and then back into their tunnel. I watched them. This was very amusing, very instructive. After they had cleaned out the last shell, the bridge started unfolding itself—the bridge of termites, mind you, started unfolding itself. Back over the top of the box, back into the tunnel they went. Thus, I got my shells cleaned without having to do too much work.

Another observation which I made was that the coral reef was very hard to dig in. I found within my section which, at that time, was the chemical section of the corps coincidentally, that our boys instead of digging a trench the way they should—instead of making it a foot wide, six feet long, and three feet deep, they were making it about four inches deep and two feet wide and six feet long. Now, one can imagine what a pattern this would offer to an enemy plane going over and strafing. One of my hardest jobs was to get the men in my section and others to dig a trench according to the specifications and the regulations which had been laid down.

But, getting back to the actual conflict on the island of Bougainville: on Monday, January the 31st, having arrived on Sunday, January the 30th, I made a tour of the perimeter which was 43,000 yards on the inside and about 24,000 along the littoral[15] which was the Empress Augusta Bay, of course. I examined all the gun positions—I found them all—[the] morale of the men was high, and that the Nips were beginning to move in close to our perimeters. It was surprising to me that I slept so soundly with the Nips just three miles away. Actually, prior to my arrival—prior to the landing of the XIV Corps and it was the XIV Corps that I joined—I understand that the landing had been made by the Marines and they had landed where there were no Nips, which makes good sense, [but] down on the Torakina beach some three miles to the south. There had been a gun emplacement and they had landed and set up their mine fields and had established somewhat of a perimeter. Then, our corps moved in with two divisions—the Thirty-seventh Division commanded by General Bob Beightler[16] of the Ohio National Guard.

Landing craft getting ready to head for the beach

That was given on our left flank and on our right flank was the Americal Division which had been made a division out of the 164th Infantry which Colonel Patch—later Lieutenant General Patch—had commanded on Guadalcanal. The Nips were in—or the Japanese, if you please, and if I've call them Nips you'll understand that they were Nippons—had taken up positions on the southern end and the northern end of the island with only a spare disbursement of their troops throughout the island. But, from the time the Marines landed until the day I arrived, the Nips had been moving in slowly from both the north and from the south, building up for a big battle. I found the perimeter wall well-defended. Time was on our side and we knew that it probably would be almost a month before the Japanese would really make a massive attack. I went down and studied every bunker, every fortification, and every field of fire. The soldiers had cleaned out the trees so as to give them at least a field of fire of 500 feet. It was all cleared and every man had studied just what

terrain he could cover and the integration of the different terrains so as to get complete coverage—a masterful job. Now, in addition to that, the intelligence officer of the corps had laid out several paths back into the jungle for a distance of about five miles. Now, the jungle in these South Pacific islands is terrific. You can't see three feet away from you. In order to ascertain and to determine

Fighting in the dense jungle

just how the Nips were moving in, the G-2[17] had laid out trips which were triangular in shape. Every day—in fact, twice a day—units would go down these pathways for a distance of five miles out across a distance of maybe one mile and back along another line to the point of beginning. Then, at the same time that they started, that one group started down one line of the triangle, another group started down the other and they would meet at a certain point. We had two Figian battalions with us and they were the best scouts you've ever seen. In almost every one of these forays which were constant—bear in mind that this went on every day for a month or better—one of the Figian or maybe two or three Figians would go with each one of our groups. Now, the Figians are a mighty fine soldier and they were tall and massive. They too put their hair straight up on their heads and it was red on top. They could smell a Nip just about like a dog would smell a rat. Many times you would be going down these jungle trails with them and all of a sudden you would find that they're not there. Then you would hear a grunt and they would come back and you knew that they had killed a Nip. They had found a Jap soldier and they had killed him. Another thing that the Figian always did was to cut [the Japanese soldier's] throats. Whenever they were even in battle where it was apparent that the Japanese were dead, they would lift up the bodies and cut the throats. They took no chances. I may say that while the Figians, who are Polynesians, not Melanesians, were somewhat primitive in their dress. On the island of Fiji the women were not covered about the waist… .

Well, after going over the perimeter and studying the defensive positions and seeing the morale was high, there was nothing to do except to tighten up wherever possible, I was constantly down on the front lines studying the defensive positions. I was always impressed with the American soldier. Thank goodness [for] the Special Services, we were able to get books out there for them to read. It was surprising to know the type of literature that so many of them were reading. Of course, the Bible was nearly always present. Shakespeare was read, [also] Milton, Johnson (that's Samuel Johnson) and Thoreau and some of the modern classics. There was not too much of the trash that was read. Nearly all of the bunkers had some pinup girls, which you could not object to. Another thing that happened while we were out there: the navy was always good to us about bringing in liquor. We had what we called a locker fund and every month the officers would put in ten dollars and, goodness, the liquor that you got for ten dollars would just astound you: always four quarts of bourbon and four fifths of scotch and then, possibly, five or six or sometimes ten bottles of wine. Well, of course, this was nice for the officers. What you did: you carried it down to the front line and gave it to the men when the circumstances would permit you.

The first action that indicated that the Nips were really moving in to us occurred on February the fourth when a Nip bomber came in at 2130 and dropped bombs on our airfield. This was my first air raid. I stayed in my dugout for an hour and a half. I found out later that this—these bombers—consisted of about eight or ten Nip ships. But, it indicated that they were beginning to move in. Of course, our intelligence, too, was telling us that the days would not be long until they would really be in close combat. From February the sixth until March the first we had air raids every night and sometimes during the day. But, it was odd that you could almost set your watch by the air raids. I dug my trench right by the side of my bed so that whenever they came over, all I did was to roll out of my cot right into the trench. Two o'clock in the morning you could expect them. Four o'clock in the morning, you could expect them. Ten o'clock at night—just so regular as you could set your watch—here

they come. Of course, they were after our bombers. The grand strategy was to establish air bases on these islands but it since [has] become known as MacArthur's "island hopping campaign." Our ships were taking off to bomb Rabaul. Rabaul had been the fueling stations for the Jap fleet. That's where they stopped on their way down to Australia. I have always felt that if they had not stopped at Rabaul, the Japs could have taken Australia. But, on March the first I went down to the front line to watch an air bombing and a strafing by our forces. I saw them drop a thousand pound bomb—many of them—and five hundred pound bombs on the Nip bivouacs which were now within five miles of our front line. This day—I notice in my diary—I made a note that I have gotten into the habit of going down front without my pistol and without my carbine and that I must stop doing that. However, unless you have been in battle, you don't realize how heavy those things are.

On March the second we knew the Japs were moving in. Every day I went down front as did all the other senior officers to see if everything was ready for the big push. On March the fifth we had a staff meeting and we went over the situation very carefully. We left with the feeling that the attack might start at anytime. On the sixth we had a show, "Claudia"[18] and I enjoyed it very much. But, unfortunately, it was interrupted by a call for us all to get to the front lines [as it] looked as though the Japs were going to attack. I must pause here and tell you, though, that we had captured a Jap who had a copy of the general attack order with him. This order stated that they were going to attack us on a dark, rainy night when they were at the greatest advantage and we were at the least. They would have the cover of darkness and we could not fight in the dark. I remember well talking it over with General Arnold. I made the comment, "Let's turn darkness into day"—night into day. He said, "Well how foolish can you be?" but we had found that when we had the search lights pointed upward and the clouds were low hanging that the light was reflected back to earth and it was almost daylight. But, then, if the clouds were not low hanging and were high, the searchlights were a miserable failure. I decided that we would experiment with some one gallon cans of gasoline thickened with napalm. By experiment I found that by putting them up that the jungle is hard on ammunition. It was necessary for us to clean the ammunition. [For] this I used the natives so to do. But, on the tenth the Japs took Hill 400 and pushed in our main line of resistance. In, the zone of the 145th they were right on our main line. But, on the twelfth they had withdrawn back from the main line. On Hill 260 there was an instant which is well worth recording. We had five men in an outpost and the Japs came up the hill so fast that the men—the five men in this outpost—could not defend themselves adequately. Three of the men we finally got out alive [but] the other two were killed. One of our soldiers became so excited that he about fifteen feet on the trunks of the napalm trees and then putting a white phosphorus grenade on top of that which could be pulled by a lanyard or a trip wire that after the explosion of the bomb—the grenade—the napalm would flow down the side of the tree and would burn for about twenty minutes. I sent down to Nouméa and got a thousand one gallon oil cans. The chemical warfare service put those out as land mines and I had a little difficulty convincing Washington that I needed them for this night experiment but finally I got them. I fixed some trip wires and also some pull wires that would go all the way back to the bunkers where our men were stationed [in] the dugouts. I had those around 43,000 yards of perimeter so that when the Nips finally did strike us, we could light the field afire and this we did.

On March the ninth the Nips were pressing us around the entire perimeter. It was quite evident from our intelligence that the Forty-fifth Infantry was going to attack on the front of our 129th Regiment. The Jap Twenty-third Infantry would be on the front of the 145th. Then, the two punches were to meet on the Piva air strip. It is also interesting to note that we found that they had already issued the orders as to how to execute the officers of the corps, how they were to line them up even as to the names. I wish I had a copy of that order. They were to take the air strip at Piva and then to line the officers up and execute us. March the tenth[19] was a particular day of emphasis for the Japs and this is the day they hit us on Hill 700[20]. We had with us a battalion of chemical mortars 4.2 [inch][21] but we also had shrapnel of that caliber designed for that mortar. In that battalion there were forty-eight mortars and on the night of the big attack—March the tenth—we fired those forty-eight mortars twenty rounds per minute for four hours. The barrel were red hot but we knew we had to stop the Japs. I may say that the jungle is hard on ammunition. It was necessary for us to clean the ammunition. [For] this I used the natives do to so. But, on the tenth the Japs took Hill 400 and pushed in our main line of resistance. In, the zone of the 145th they

were right on our main line. But, on the twelfth they had withdrawn back from the main line. On Hill 260 there was an instant which is well worth recording. We had five men in an outpost and the Japs came up the hill so fast that the men—the five men in this outpost—could not defend themselves adequately. Three of the men we finally got out alive [but] the other two were killed. One of our soldiers became so excited that he failed to pull the pin [of his grenade] and he hit a Nip in the forehead and knocked him out. Later he killed him with his rifle. When we got these men out of this outpost, they were really in such a mental state that we were afraid that we would have to evacuate them.

Hill 260 was a long promontory and the outpost of which I have just made mention was on one side right at the point of this promontory. There was a tree which I have described as the most expensive tree in the world. It was in such a position that the Japs could come up on the far side of the hill and get into the roots of the banyan tree and fire at our men who [were] trying to get the three live men out of the OP [outer perimeter]. {This] made it almost impossible. We threw all of our artillery and our hand grenades and our flame throwers—everything—at that tree. It was finally reduced when three Seabees[22]—or two Seabees, rather—seeing the situation, got an empty can of gasoline (or barrel) and rigged it up so that they could hook a one-half inch pipe into it… . They stole from the hospital an oxygen tank. Then, they took the tank of oxygen together with the gasoline barrel now filled with gasoline to the foot of the hill on our side, of course, and fished [?] the one-half inch pipe up the hill. [They] turned on the oxygen which gave enough pressure to force the gasoline up the hill and into the tree. Thus, they burned the Japs out. Of course, they [the Seabees] were decorated for it.

The most expensive tree in the world

On March the thirteenth the Japs left Hill 700 after they had been driven into our main line of re-sis-tance by the 148th Infantry. We counted 349 dead Japs within our main line of resistance. On March the fourteenth I witnessed the registration of some delayed percussion-type fuses on 4.2 mortar shells. I was out in front and unfortunately in a dugout with a captain [and] my guard. Neither one of the three of us had anything to defend outselves [with] and we were then in rock-throwing distance of the Japs. Fortunately, nothing happened.

The fight continued on through the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth [of March]. But, by the fifteenth it was quite apparent that the Japs were beginning to feel that they had lost the attack. We expended in this Battle of Bougainville—sometimes called the [Battle of] Empress Augusta Bay—100,000 105 shells. I made a comment that on March the sixteenth after having spent all that ammunition that the Japs were still there. Now, daily we were dropping between seventy and ninety tons of ammunition on Rabaul so that we could destroy their air strikes against us and also their navy.

Tanks and Infantry battle the enemy

March the fifteenth was a significant day for on that day at six o'clock in the morning the enemy opened up with their artillery on our course CP [command post]. We all hit our dugouts and we stayed there. We had figured that we had annihilated one of the Japanese regiments but still they came. While I was in the dugout—while we were ALL in the dugout as far as that is concerned—we had a very, very severe earthquake. On the sixteenth we had another air raid. I made a comment that I thought our artillery was quite overrated.

On March the twentieth I was down near the ammunition dump when one of the Jap artillery shells

hit it and really set off a train explosion. They really must have thought they laid an egg. These shells were whistling through the air and did so for about an hour. Now, I hit the dust and was under a log and there was a cockatoo—one of those white birds. This was [its] nesting place and it certainly objected to my being in there but that made no difference [as] I was going to stay. On that day MacArthur made the statement that the Battle of the Solomons—of course, Bougainville was in the Solomons archipelago—was ended. But, this was all wrong because the Japs continued to shove us. On the twentieth [and] twenty-first they again hit us although we could see that this battle was going in our direction—still, they were there. Secretary Knox[23] said that the Japs were evacuating the island. Well, this was all wrong but I guess it was something that they had to tell people back home. Nevertheless, it is true that the Japs were just about through on the twenty-second, which was a day to be remembered. They laid their artillery on us all day. On March twenty-third (which was my birthday) again they shelled us. On March twenty-fourth they massed for an all-out attack but we laid all of our artillery and all of our mortar zones [on ?] this position. We spent over 11,000 rounds of artillery and mortar ammunition on that day to frustrate their attacks. And, we did stop them. I visited the front and inspected our position. On the twenty-fifth the Japs were still hoping that they could penetrate our lines but, nevertheless, the attacks grew weaker and weaker. On the 26th I went to church in the morning and I thanked God for the success that we had had up to the present moment. After church I went down to the front again.

The Men of Bougainville

On the twenty-seventh there was another attack but it was fading out. On the twenty-eighth we felt that everything was as quiet as it would ever be. We knew the Japs were withdrawing. But, here is the hardest part of soldiering: it's keeping the pressure on. As the Japs withdrew, to get our men out of their dugouts and to keep the pressure on [the enemy] was the hardest job that I think we have ever had to tackle. We estimated that we had killed about 5000 Japs. MacArthur had so stated. But, actually, by [our] count we had killed 3508. Our casualties during that battle were 207 dead, 1624 wounded, and twenty-one missing… .

In a limited objective attack down near Hill 260 I was privileged to meet up with six of the New Mexico A&M boys. We have a picture of that; it was published in the papers back in the States. One of them was Jack Campbell, who came by on Sunday, February the 20th, and who was with Company A of the 164th Infantry.

To read one's diary after battle is very interesting. I note in my March thirtieth comment: "Whatever jeopardizes the discharge of a man's duty is a flaw in his conduct"—end of quotation. I find another note that the payroll on our island is $5,500,000 per month. During the Battle of Bougainville we dropped 1098 tons of bombs on the Japs. On that same day we dropped 110 tons of bombs on Rabaul. It shows you how expensive battles [have] become. On April second it was Palm Sunday and I went to church after which I went down the front of the first battalion of the 129th Infantry. The following day I went to the 132nd Infantry to see about Lt. Robert Hannon, an alumnus of New Mexico A&M College. I found that he had been wounded and evacuated. I then

Soilders from New Mexico A&M College at Bou-

visited their lines and my notes say that it was well-organized. On that day, April third, 112 tons of bombs were dropped on Rabaul. The Battle of Bougainville had ended. It was my first battle. It was the first defensive battle in which I have been engaged. I have the highest admiration for the American soldier; throughout it all, they were brave and were courageous and they did what they were expected to do.

I mentioned [previously] lighting up the front with the napalm in the one-pound gasoline cans. I was greatly astounded after the battle to be awarded the Bronze Star for lighting up the field of fire. It seemed to me to be an insignificant thing to justify an award but I do hope and pray that it saved some American lives.

ENDNOTES

1 From April 1943 Maj. Gen. Oscar Wollverton Griswold served as Commanding General of the Army's XIV Corps, which saw action in the New Georgia and Bougainville campaigns as well as in the Philippines during the Battle of Manila, February 1945.

2 The Ninety-third Division was a segregated unit of Afro-American soldiers, units of which first saw action in World War I under the command of the French Army after the American and British forces refused to accept black soldiers for combat duty. Under the French, members of the Ninety-third served heroically and received numerous decorations from the grateful French government. The Army reactivated the division in May 1942 at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where General Milton took part in their training. The Division saw service in New Guinea, Bougainville, and the Admiralty Islands although principally in construction units and in defensive and security operations. On Bougainville, some combat units of the Ninety-third were attached to the Americal Division and XIV Corps and participated in raids and patrols along the enemy's perimeter. See Lee, Ulysses. *United States Army in World War II; Special Studies: The Employment of Negro Troops.* (Washington, D.C: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1966).

3 Tonga or Tongan, is an archipelago of 169 islands in the South Pacific south of Samoa. As an independent constitutional monarchy that was a protectorate of the British Western Pacific Territories, Tonga was unique in that it was allowed to keep its indigenous government and was never formally "colonized"—a point of great pride for its citizens.

4 A lighter was a vessel, commonly an unpowered, flat-bottomed barge used in lightening or loading and unloading ships or in transporting goods for short distances.

5 Japan's rapid conquest of Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific in the winter of 1941 and spring of 1942 amounted to nothing less than a juggernaut. While Allied forces struggled to recover from devastating losses, Japan made a tactical decision to secure Rabaul, New Britain, as their major center of operations in the South Pacific. From there they planned to choke off Allied supply lines to Australia completely with the strategic occupation of Port Moresby, New Guinea and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. Allied forces, however, alerted to these plans through decoded Japanese signals, deployed air craft carriers to the Coral Sea. From May 4 to 8, 1942, the first major naval battle between the Japanese and Allied forces took place with heavy losses to both sides. Considered a tactical victory for Japan because they inflicted greater damage, the battle was in fact strategically more positive for the Allied forces. By turning back a damaged Japanese fleet the Allies put a brake on Japanese aggression in the area and effectively ended the Imperial Navy's hopes for an invasion of Australia. This battle also brought the Japanese to an important realization: they were occupying too much territory with inadequate troops, reinforcements, and supplies.

6 One of the Solomon Islands and now known as Makira

7 Also known as the Nggela Islands, a small group in the Central Province of the Solomon Islands

8 In May 1942, the Japanese invaded the Solomon Islands and established a naval base of operations at Tulagi in preparation for their advance on Port Moresby, New Guinea. Tulagi was retaken by U.S. Marines in August 1942, early in the Guadalcanal Campaign which was to last another six months.

9 Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs) are amphibious assault vessels for transport of tanks and personnel onto beachheads

10 The Battle of Tenaru River (alternately called the Battle of Alligator Creek or Ilu River) introduced the U.S. Army and Marines to Japanese land battle tactics. Victory at Tenaru despite savage, suicidal attacks by the outnumbered Japanese forces was both a great morale booster for the Allies and a sobering realization of the enemy's determination to fight to the death.

11 Army General Alexander McCarrell Patch commanded the Allied offensive on Guadalcanal. He had formed the Americal Division from a collection of loosely organized units and sent it into action on Guadalcanal, making it the first Army unit to conduct an offensive operation against the enemy in any theater. General Patch moved up to command of the XIV Corps and gained notice for his personal heroism in leading dangerous offensives during the Guadalcanal Campaign. After his successes against the Japanese, he was ordered to the European Theater where he took over command of the Seventh Army and led it from Southern France into Germany.

12 Maj. General William H. Arnold served as commander of the Americal Division from November 1944 through its deactivation in 1945. The identities of Blocker [?] and O'Gwyn [?]

cannot be verified.

[13] This large island in the Solomons archipelago had its first brush with European colonialism in 1768 when it was "discovered" and named by French explorer, Louis Antoine de Bougainville. In 1885 the German New Guinea Company established control over Bougainville while the remainder of the Solomons became a British protectorate. During World War I Australia took over German territories in New Guinea and the Solomons until the League of Nations formally placed them under Australian mandate in 1920. The Japanese occupied Bougainville in 1942.

[14] Yaws is an infectious bacterial disease endemic in tropical areas. Historically, it particularly affected children in overpopulated areas and in its chronic form often resulted in debilitating bone and tissue deformities. Combined with poverty and malnutrition yaws contributed to greatly shortened life spans in such areas. Today it can be cured by a single penicillin injection.

[15] Edge of the ocean

[16] Maj. Gen. Robert Beightler. For a full account of military strategy, planning, personnel, and operations on Bougainville, see Gailey, Harry A. *Bougainville, 1943-1945: The Forgotten Campaign*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

[17] Army intelligence officer

[18] A popular domestic comedy directed by Edmund Goulding and starring Dorothy McGuire and Robert Young. Somewhat ironically, the film explores a young couple's reaction to the impending death of a parent.

[19] Possibly, Gen. Milton refers here to the Japanese practice of dividing each month into three segments of ten or jun. The tenth of the month would mark the passage of jôjun into ch?gun. March, in the lunar calendar favored by the Japanese, also marks the begin ning of spring and signifies new life.

[20] Hill 700 marked the highest elevation on Bougainville held by the Allies but it was still lower than positions held by the Japanese. The Japanese "plan of maneuver involved two thrusts from the north coupled with an attack from the northeast, all on a complicated schedule. Briefly, the Iwasa Unit was to attack and secure Hill 700 on Y Day (set, after some delays in moving into position, for 8 March), reorganized on 9 and 10 March, and advance to the Piva airfields." Miller, op cit., p. 356. See also Miller, pp. 358-64, for a detailed account of the Japanese attack on Hill 700.

[21] For additional information on chemical 4.2 inch mortars, see www.4point2.org/mortar42.htm

[22] Nickname for members of the Naval Construction Battalion

[23] William Franklin "Frank" Knox, former Rough Rider in the