

INTRODUCTION

In about 1975 the family of World War II Corporal Short Osborne of Wise County, Virginia gave me a photocopy of a document typed in 1943 by the American Japanese translator who was part of the headquarters staff of the US Army that was fighting the Japanese on Makin Island, a part of the Gilbert Archipelago. Osborne had just shot and killed the author of this diary, and had given it to the translator to review. This is my transcription of that translator's typed translation. It has never been published before. Osborne's family hoped that one day I would publish it.

Lawrence J. Fleenor, Jr.
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JOURNAL OF A JAPANESE LT .COMMANDER (EXECUTIVE OFFICER) FROM THE BATTLE FOR MAKIN ISLAND IN WORLD WAR II

November 17 & 18 (1943) -3:30 PM-B24's have bombed and strafed the island. One plane was shot down.

November 19 -Big bombers came over and dropped a few bombs, for the 16th time. A few antiaircraft fired at the planes. Our patrol boat reported they will be ready for the planes or any invasion. Two of our radars are out of order.

November 20- 3:15 AM 32 planes from the aircraft carrier, raided this place. 8 big bombers and 16 small planes dropped numerous bombs. We used our antiaircraft guns on them. Naval guns from battleships were used extensively and did a lot of damage. They caused fires. 13 ships have been sighted. 19 of our officers have withdrawn to some unknown place.

November 21- We haven't eaten since yesterday, 0400. We have sighted two battleships, 4 cruisers, and 3 other naval craft. All ships opened fire on us. Enemy planes have bombed and strafed us from the east and west. Most of the coconut trees have been destroyed. Naval guns must have fired about 4 miles away.

Between 0700 and 0800 naval guns must have concentrated their fire on buildings and houses, and have destroyed most of them. Enemy tanks have landed about the same time. Their troops followed behind the tanks when leaving the landing crafts. Our commanding officer told the men to defend the island to the last man. The enemy troops on the eastern beach have landed and used small field artillery (37mm?).

November 22 & 23 -We haven't eaten for three days, except for a few coconuts. We had another big battle tonight and a lot of men have been killed and wounded. We decided to move the wounded. A half hour later, while moving the wounded, we came in contact with enemy tanks. After the tanks opened fire on us, our commander told the men to disperse and withdraw.

November 24- Our commander hasn't any idea of the number of casualties we suffered. It was reported the Obu Commander had been killed by enemy aerial bombs. It was also reported that a lot of enemy trucks, tanks, and small vehicles (jeeps?) have landed. Luckily we have a lot of small lakes to obstruct their passage. Today I don't know whether I will live or not and I have decided to tell the men to fight to the last breath. I asked for volunteers to hold the lines even with their lives. Many have responded.

November 25- We lost four men from the Command Post, who were observing for planes and tanks. One of our officers has been wounded.

November 26- The same wounded officer died today. We came in contact with some troops from the other outfit. They offered us food and wine. The same night we had a big battle.

November 27- Last night, after the big battle, we suffered a heavy amount of casualties. We had some reinforcements, mostly laborers, to help us fight the enemy.

November 28 -At high tide, most of our men gathered together to fight. Some of our troops found enemy hand grenades.

November 29- We leave our fate to Buddha. We decided to go to Kutoma Island, but the enemy patrolled that island for two or three days and have bivouacked on the eastern shore. We spent the night on Kutoma. We sighted 9 tanks and 7 of them were going to the village. The remaining 2 tanks hung around near our 3 positions. It seems as though they are on reconnaissance.

November 30 -Yesterday we counted at least 9 tanks (probably alligators) at 2:00 PM. We met some natives and they told us the enemy withdrew in the morning. We were preparing something to eat yesterday, when we saw a couple of planes overhead. A lot of enemy reinforcements have landed. The natives also informed us that two of our men have been captured.

December 1 -There was a bright moon last night and we raided the enemy's food. We also got some coconuts. We were very careful on our patrol. Today we saw 19 tanks. We saw the natives moving their personal things. At night we came out again and asked the natives for some drinking water. On our way we met American soldiers, and we decided to wait. Tomorrow we know not what is in store for us.

December 3 -We had some food today and our bodies were strengthened after a rest. Some of our men crossed the water to some unknown place. We saw two second generation Japanese in the American Army. The natives told us that some Japanese carriers have been sunk.

December 4- Some of our men went to the north side of the beach. We were eating coconuts when we heard some hand grenades explode. Some of our men were shouting hysterically, "Nakamura", and a corporal went out to find out what this was all about. They fired five rounds. The enemy returned a heavy fire. We made our way to the beach and met 13 of the enemy. We battled for one hour and lost two men. This leaves us seven men. From 1:00 to 3:00, we saw planes in the air. They dropped bombs near our positions. Every since this battle, we are very

much satisfied, even though we lived on coconuts most of the time. I'm very much worried over four of our wounded men. A half hour later they died. We went out to fight some more, even with hand grenades and swore we would keep on fighting until we die. The weather has been very dry lately. We still have rations for 18 men. We found Nakamura, who is only 21 years old, dead. Later at night we moved one mile into the woods. We, some of the 14 Imperial Air Force, and some Marines, total 8 men. We ate our evening meal and having finished, we moved to our position, ready to battle the enemy. We were hiding near the lake until 0300 and then came out. December 5- Last night we crossed the water. The sky was cleared and bright. There was a breeze and it was cold. We were running up and down the beach and shots were fired in our direction. Food is scarce.

December 6- Today is almost like yesterday. Not much activity.

December 7- This morning the weather is fair. Ten of us had breakfast together. Four men from the Furuikama outfit took their rations with them and went their way. Two enemy tanks passed our positions at 0800. Later, two men from the Air Force, came out and ate breakfast. Later we went to a small house. There we met two more of our men. The 5 of us went to look for drinking water. Two more men came to the house. Now there are seven of us. We divided the ammunition among us. Two tanks from the sea came back. 5 of our men hid in the water near the beach. We saw the American troops eating nearby. We were worried as to how we could escape. We decided to swim away. We swam for 60 or 70 meters. When we came out of the water, the skin on our hands and faces looked like dead men's skin. We wondered why the rest of the men did not come with us.

December 8- Today is the second anniversary of our great Asiatic and South Seas Campaign. We have been thinking about our glorious past campaigns. We did not see the enemy so we went to look for food and drinking water. We made up our minds to fight to the end, or to commit suicide if we are to be captured. At night we heard the sound of planes in the air.

December 9 -Strangely enough, we are still alive. The weather is clear and the moon is bright. We can see our shadows, together with those of the coconut trees.

December 10 -In the morning we saw enemy patrol boats going towards Kuma Village. Our food is getting scarce. We have been living on coconuts for the past nine days.

December 11- Today looks like another clear day and I feel like singing a song. There is a breeze coming from the northwest. I hope the tanks won't come today, so that I can rest my body.

December 12- As usual, we had coconuts for breakfast. About 0700 we saw three boats headed for Butaritari from Kuma Village. The tide is high and moon is full. We plan to depart from Kuma Village on the 13th or the 14th

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December 13 -This morning I have decided to go back to the small house and gather up the rest of my personal belongings, and go somewhere else. At midnight I washed my head and face.

This is the last entry in the diary. Corporal Short Osbome of Wise County (#33156569 of the Headquarters and Base Service Squadron, 363nd Service Group APO #959) shot and killed its author at the above mentioned house, and took the diary from his body.