



# What Happened to Jimmy?

**June 19, 1945**

Our current assignment is to relieve the Seventh Marine Regiment on Okinawa and attack the enemy with a spearhead drive to the sea on the south end of the island. This objective, if successful, will divide what's left of the Japanese army on Okinawa in half. We will keep our enemy on the run, off balance and unable to regroup and dig in. The drive starts at midnight and much of our time will be spent moving quickly out into the darkness and on into daybreak.

Time: 0500 and it is becoming light. We are getting close to the enemy and the environment is horrible. We are surrounded by many dead bodies. Some are enemy soldiers and others are Marines. The smell is sickening. The flies are thick and the maggots busy. I am well aware that I could be next, and so is Jimmy. We continue to move quickly forward in a half run. Man am I getting tired. We sure could use a short rest but I don't want to stop here — the smell is too sickening.

Instantly, two Sherman Tanks become visible. The comfort of this sight dissipates quickly as they mistake us for the enemy and open fire. Two men in our outfit are hit by the shrapnel and fall. Before we can comprehend the veracity of our situation, Pruner is shot. He falls lifeless, and dies before his body hits the ground. As we scurry for cover, another man is shot by the Japanese and falls to the ground. He doesn't live long. We are surrounded by calls for "Corpsman".

We have run right into the front line of the Seventh Marines whom we are to relieve. There was no small arms fire, no mortars or artillery to warn us anyone was near. Both the Marines and the Japanese are dug in, waiting for movement. The Seventh Marines realize who we are and stop firing in our direction. They are happy to have replacements. We're exhausted from running, but we look fresh compared to them.



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## *A look at man subjected to hell.*

*Who is Jimmy? He is a 21 year-old Marine with extensive combat experience. He was on the islands of Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, and now he is on Okinawa. He is a fire-team leader in the Third Squad.*

*I am 19 and stand next to him as a rifleman assigned to his fire-team. A fire-team is composed of four men: a leader, and three men. Jimmy is courageous and a good leader. I have great confidence in Jimmy and I'd follow him anywhere.*

*He is not your typical Marine. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke or even curse. He always carries a small bible in his pocket. He is easygoing and smiles most of the time. On L-Day at Okinawa, two ships in Jimmy's convoy are lost as a result of Kamikaze attacks.*



Two men are on their way to the rear with traumatic-stress injury. One has gone psychologically blind and the other has chronic nausea. I see Jimmy looking at the two men. He isn't smiling now.

Jimmy gets up and begins to run again. He runs, dodges, and jumps over bullets as they hit the ground beneath his feet. I follow. It may not do any good to dodge, but you sure feel like doing so when you hear the whine of bullets sailing past only inches away.

Several huge enemy missiles go over. They resemble 50 gallon drum barrels and seem to move too slowly to stay airborne. They make a airy humm-hissing sound and the tone gets deeper as they fly overhead and explode into a group of Marines behind us. We continue to run forward because it is no safer back there.

The battle continues. Marines die along with Japanese soldiers. We move slowly forward. I'm weak from the constant physical strain on my body, numb from what my senses must endure, and deaf from the constant fire-fight and men cursing all around me. Jimmy is experiencing all of this as we fight together, but he isn't cursing like me. He doesn't curse.

We are now at the spearhead. We have broken through enemy lines, and have kept them running. I am completely exhausted, but I must go on out of self preservation. It is easier to kill an enemy that isn't able to defend against our attack (as opposed to one that gathers itself and is able to fight back).

Several huge artillery shells just exploded nearby about forty yards to the right. I can see one of our field ambulances working it's way up to the area. (Word gets to us that the commander of the Tenth Army, General Simon Bolivar Buckner was just killed by the artillery. He and his aids were observing the battle. His body is loaded and taken away).



Top: Sherman tanks clear out an area ahead and to the right of our position. They are no longer firing at us.

Above: General Simon Bolivar Buckner (right) a few minutes before his death on Okinawa. He stands on this Eighth Marine Division observation post on the front lines to watch Marines attack in the valley below. Colonel Clarence R. Wallace, (center) and Major William Chamberlin (left) were unhurt. (Photograph and caption courtesy of "Follow Me", the story of the 2nd Marine Division.) Incidentally, I later found out I was a distantly related to General Buckner. I didn't know it at the time.



We get a moment to stop and are standing among a cluster of huge craters made by our own battleship coastal shelling. Whew, it's nice to finally stop running again. I never knew a guy could be so weak and still move with such complete accuracy and purpose. Jimmy shows me a black streak on his bicep where a bullet left its mark after just missing him. "Close call huh Redemer?" he says with a kind smile.

"On the move!" We're up and going again. We can't wait any longer and allow the Japanese to get organized. As we work our way up to a crossing over a ridge, I see hundreds of the enemy below, running across an open area about one mile across. Surely they're the ones we've been chasing to this point. We open fire, some fall.

Enemy artillery ensues in reply and Japanese riflemen open fire on our position. Jimmy stands and advances towards the barrage. We run twenty or thirty yards and take cover. I am in a small depression in the ground with him. We're all

pinned down by mortar shells and machine gun fire. The constant noise of battle is everywhere. Japanese soldiers fire at us. Marines fire back.

"Hey Redemer.", Jimmy gestures. I look over at him and see his characteristic smile as he looks back at me, but there is something different about him.



Top: PFC Duane Redemer, November, 1945 in Japan together with my Platoon for a picture.

Above: One of many sketches I made in the field. This one depicts Marines taking cover in a small, rocky foxhole. Bullets hail down from the upper right. A casualty lays dead in the foreground.

Right: Marines surround a Japanese cave. The Marine in the upper left throws a Satchel Charge into the entrance while the others provide cover.



“Watch this”, he adds as he looks away, raises his weapon and steadies his hand. I look indirectly down the barrel of his M-1 Garand to see what he was sighting. As my focus changes from the tip of his rifle to his target, some 100 yards away, I can clearly see an old man walking down a dirt road. What is an old man doing walking so close to a firefight? I wonder to myself. Doesn't he know there is a....

“Bpowwoo” sounds Jimmy's rifle and the elderly man falls.

I am shocked and confused. ‘Is that Jimmy next to me?’ I wonder as he turns back with his pleasant grin. How could he do that? How could the nicest guy in our outfit, who carries a bible at the ready, shoot a defenseless old man? Is this the guy I've just followed through seven hours of fighting? Is this the Marine I have covered, and who has covered me? My confidence in him is broken, but our objective hasn't changed.

We are ordered to pull back and regroup. We're all in need of ammo and supplies. Our company has taken heavy losses. As we work our way back, we have to run across an open area where a machine gunner is taking advantage of the moving targets. We return fire and cover each other as we head across the long stretch. The next man is signaled to begin his run. Hawk covers him with his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle).

“Next!” Another Marine leaps out and begins to run. This time the machine gunner targets the man providing cover-fire and Hawk falls dead.

Dixon jumps at his turn and gets only half way across. He is alive, but pinned down behind shallow cover.

Jimmy jumps up and begins his long journey across the open ground. The enemy machine gunner turns to Jimmy and shoots the “ditty-bag” off of his backpack as he runs.

All of us who made it are now across except Dixon. It is impossible to get to him and he doesn't have time to stand up and run. Instead Two enemy soldiers shoved him over with their feet, then left him for dead. He joined back up with our squad later.)

*Right: A Marine clears out the hard rooted enemy with a flame-thrower.*

*Below: A cave is cleared with a Satchel Charge thrown from behind the tree in the background. This is the same scene depicted in the drawing on the opposite page.*



Sherman Tanks arrive and we follow them to the next ridge. We have almost completed our objective, and enemy fire is lessening. Jimmy begins to look troubled.

“Hey Redemer,” he mumbles. “You gotta help her”.

I look at him. I can’t figure out what he’s talking about.

“You gotta help her Redemer. She’s just a little girl”, he says louder.

“What’re you talkin’ about Jimmy?” I ask. “I don’t see no little girl”.

“You gotta help her Redemer. She’s just a little girl”, he repeats.



Top: A Marine cautiously makes his way through an area where fighting has already taken place.

Right: A sketch I did showing a Japanese grenade attack.

Below: “Jimmy” James, myself and the rest of the platoon in Japan, November 1945. (Jimmy top, Redemer below)



to other squads. I didn’t see Jimmy very often after that. He was soon sent home, as he had built up many “points” from his extensive service to the Marine Corps.

War is hell, make no mistake. It is surreal insanity. It is a situation where reality becomes elusive. I came to realize that when Jimmy shot that old man, in his own mind he was probably shooting an enemy soldier. When he



Members of Jimmy's platoon hold up war souvenirs for the photographer. I'm not in this picture. Jimmy is circled above.

was pleading for help for the "little girl" he may have been seeking relief from his own reality. Maybe Jimmy really did shoot an enemy soldier and it was I who perceived truth incorrectly. After all, what would a little old man be doing, walking so calmly, next to a raging battle? I guess I'll never know for sure.

What happened to Jimmy can happen to anyone who finds themselves in his situation. Heavy combat can distort a persons reality. Everyone is affected by it, all in varying degrees.

I am a sworn protector of the civilian populous and I stand intolerant of individuals who intentionally harm the innocent. When someone is accused of harming civilians, however, a clear determination should be attempted to ascertain the mental state of the accused. We can't judge someone's actions based on our own assertions made in a serene environment. We have to remember what the effects of recent stimuli may have had on one's sanity. In a real combat situation, an accused must not always be judged solely on their actions.

I often wonder what kind of dreams Jimmy had after the war. After I was sent home, I slept with a weapon under my pillow. For weeks I would awaken at the slightest noise, sitting straight up, eyes wide, and weapon at hand. It was years until this feeling dissipated completely, and I consider myself to have left the military unaffected for the most part. I saw many men who were sent home who would probably never maintain a healthy mental existence. All casualties are not purely physical ones.




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