Chapter 16

Still Fighting

My name is David Bradley. I have brown hair and hazel eyes. I was 19 in 1943.

The ocean, waves, heat, humidity, and tropical were so foreign to me in this strange place so far from my home. Back at home, I live in Rock Springs, Wyoming were the most exotic sight is when a government official in a suit come demanding payments from my neighbors. Grass plains stretch on for miles with mountains dotted throughout the land, giving shelter and a home to all the wildlife roaming about. How I missed my home at times like now where the fighting has stopped, and I don’t know what to do on these islands during my free time.

Being only a private in the army, I have a lot of free time besides chores and patrol duties like most other men. I was drafted, too, so many of the other boys that volunteered think little of me or my ability to fight the enemy. I may only be nineteen, but I can still the job as well as any other person.

What seemed like both too soon and not soon enough, orders came in of my division leaving the island and preparing for a new assault somewhere else. Just this past month in March from the 2nd to the 4th, our navy and supporting planes had won a victory over the Japanese in the Battle of Bismarck Sea. I wondered how there was enough men to cover all the land we kept taking from the Japanese troops and how we had enough supplies. Maybe there was just more people than I thought of since not many lived back home.

While sitting in my berth aboard the ship to take me to the new objective, I listened to the radio softly tell the other men in the room the conditions on the fronts both in the Pacific and Europe. I was listening to the lady drone on about victories on the Pacific front and heavy losses occurring to Hitler’s army when a new broadcaster came over the radio with a special announcement. He said the U.S. command had been able to pinpoint the location of Japanese Admiral Yamamoto while he was flying in a bomber near Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. With the bravery and courage of 18 P-38 fighters, they managed to shoot the plane down to the mucky depths of the ocean. The effect on moral was immediate as many praised the good fortune and ease as to the upcoming battle we were to face. I, on the other hand, sat listening to other reports, not thinking much would change with a replacement surely to take over the Japanese fleet.

Three days later, President Roosevelt announced that the Japanese had executed several airmen from the Doolittle Raid. The next day, the Japanese announced the captured Allied pilots will be given a “one way ticket to hell.” I mourned for my fallen soldiers and hoped to put the Japanese in their place this coming invasion.

The day had finally come on May 10 when my division and several other troops invaded Attu in the Aleutian Islands. According to intelligence, the Japanese fleets and holds had been weakened so much, they only had about 2,300 men to defend the island, and their supplies had only been coming in by submarines at night.

As my water craft neared the beaches, I prepared myself for the onslaught and carriage that surely would be present with every battle against the Japs. What surprised me was we all managed to land on the beaches and establish a front with no resistance from the enemy. Besides the hum and commotion of the equipment, I felt as if the island was in an eerie silence with no mortars and gunfire being exchanged yet. This changed, however, as I started to make my way inland to capture the rest of the island.

Almost right away, heavy shelling and sprays of gunshots littered the ground around us as the defenders quickly put up fierce resistance. Not being able to see each other in the foliage, I dug in close to the base of a tree for better protect and waited for our own shelling to begin on the enemy's positions. When this happened, I stayed as low as possible to wait out the worst of our artillery before my commanding officer lead us to attack the front lines. Finally, we had exchanged fire for several days with constant supplies pouring in to stop their ever growing threat. Our biggest threat, however, was the lack of oversight of the conditions of the island. Every night was nearly a fight for my life as I nearly froze from the sudden drop in temperatures.

For about two weeks, this was the norm with the back and forth exchanges and battles before tragedy occurred. On May 29, the Japs lead a large suicide charge against our positions to break through the lines and ultimately defeat our hold. Somehow, they managed to break through all of our lines and slaughter just as many men as we were doing to them. As I held back a group advancing to my foxhole, I saw the only friend I had made during this war fall from a Japanese blade. Something inside me broke as I uttered a cry for my best friend and the injustice of this war. Leaving the relative safety of my foxhole, I took down anyone that was in my way of my friend.

Having reached him, I began to try and save him. Putting pressure on the wound, I tried to hold onto hope for him, but he had been stabbed through the gut. “I’m gonna save you. Don’t you worry none about this. It’s just a scratch!” I was telling him nonsense and he knew it.

Grabbing onto my arms, he choked out, “Keep going...for me.” And then, he died in my arms.

Later, when the fight had ended, the casualty count came to be 2,351 Japanese killed and 3,929 Americans killed. Two days later, on the 31st, the Japanese ended occupation on the Aleutian Islands, and we finished the capture of Attu.

For the next month, I was numb to everyone around me and only doing chores and other duties automatically, as if I were a robot. Not even the news of the Allies advancing on New Georgia in the Solomon Islands on June 21 changed me. I listened as others said how they had taken it by surprise with an amphibious force. There were five landing points, but they had difficulties from reefs, mud, intense bombardments, and 5,000 Japanese defenders. However, by August 25, the Allied had completed the occupation of New Georgia.

On August 6/7, the Battle of Vella Gulf commenced in the Solomon Islands. Everyone but me it seemed was overcome with joy because we had hit every target without a single casualty. I wish my friend had been here to see it.

On November 1, U.S. Marines invaded Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. All of these reports came from another soldier who knew about my friend, but he was never quite me friend. He told me of the two counterattack air waves from the Japs and how they had put up a great battle in the skies. He later told me as news came in that the first defenders only numbered 300, so there was only small resistance. However, as the troops moved inward, the resistance turned fierce and bloody for everyone. By November 25, we had successfully taken the objective.

I would be seeing action again real soon. Shellshock was not an excuse that got you sent home, nor would I be able to go home with only minor injuries as cuts and bruises. I wished for my friend to return, but I felt guilty about that. At least he didn’t have to see anymore war and crime and bloody messes. I was 19 years old. I have seen too much but more yet was to come.