Chapter 25

Turkey Shoot

My name is Nathaniel Ford. I have blond hair and hazel eyes. I was 27 in 1944.

An eerie silence was cast about the ship as men and machines stopped all activity and all firing. For days now, the heavy guns blasted the land and shores of what our target zones were for the invasion of Saipan. All of this activity was nothing like what happens back at home in Spartanburg, South Carolina. There were no bombardments lasting for hours and days at a time to soften enemy defenses. If there had been any, it would have probably scared my new baby boy and my wife, Sarah, back at home. I miss them dearly, but I must stay and help get rid of the Japanese menace from these islands. I would never wish them to invade our home in the United States, nor anywhere close to our home.

When the guns stopped firing, everyone was transfixed by the silence save for the gentle sounds of water against the hull. The spell seemed to have broken quickly later because everyone was moving again, jumping into the landing crafts and setting sail for our next objective. Being a Second Lieutenant, I did not have much power, but I did command a small band of soldiers once we were firmly planted on the island.

On June 15, our commanding officers of the U.S. Marines ordered us to invade Saipan in the Mariana Islands. Right away as we climbed out of our crafts, the beaches and sandbars were littered with bodies and bullets as we climbed further inland. The Japs resistance was so much fiercer than what the brass originally had thought it would be. There seemed to be twice as many defenders than the estimated number had been. Our earlier heavy bombardment had absolutely little effectiveness against the Japanese so well done systems of trenches and foxholes. In about 20 minutes, we got 8,000 men onto the beaches to fight back against the Japanese. The cost, however, came up to a 10% casualty rate in just our first day of taking the beaches. Somehow or another, we claimed a firm hold onto the beach head, and the top Generals started to make plans for the initial push inland.

For the next few days, many more soldiers came up onto the beaches and many of them appeared to be of the regular army. This became even more apparent as our lines moved steadily up the mountains and forests of the island. The line became u-shaped from the difference in fighting of our two branches of service. The army in the middle was moving much slower, digging in every so often and waiting for their supplies to catch up. We the Marines, however, had a much more aggressive approach to the Japs the two divisions on the outside quickly went ahead of the army.

While we were pushing ahead, I received some news from back in the bay and coasts of this island. On June 19, this battle became known as The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot! There was a great battle between the fighting aircrafts of the two powers. At the end, however, the U.S. carrier-based fighters shot down 429 Japanese planes while we had only lost 29. This seemed to mark the end of Japanese naval power.

This became evident, too, when the Japanese defenders we fought on the island were running out of supplies. Our American submarine campaign had lead to short supplies for the Japanese war effort. On July 5 in an effort to finally kick us back and off the island, the Japanese unleashed a banzai charge with 3,000 troops. The charge was nothing more than a suicide charge because all in that charge were killed within a few days. Four days later, the entire island was taken. 23,000 Japanese had been killed and 3,426 Americans were as well. The Japanese filled the civilians with lies about us because in those few days as well, over 8,000 civilians committed mass suicide. Many parents killed their children before jumping off the cliffs to end their lives as well. Forever shall I live with what I saw those few days and forever shall I regret we did not do something sooner to save more of them.

With this island taken, our next objective was to take the island of Guam in the next few days. We loaded back up onto ships and prepared to fight. Beforehand, a month of continuous bombardments on the island was in place to soften defenses and defenders. By the end, about 28,761 shells had been released onto the island. Finally on July 19, the U.S. Marines again invaded Guam still in the Marianas. The fighting was much more minimal here and the beachhead was secured that night. During our fighting for the island, the Japanese tried their hand at their own counter attack with 19,000 defenders. This turned out to be relatively ineffective against our troops. Finally on July 27, all American troops completed the liberation of Guam.

During the mop up jobs and passing out food and clothes to the people on this island, I received news of another successful invasion just starting three days ago. On the 24th, more U.S. Marines invaded Tinian. Before the invasion, they too had heavy bombardments and the also used the first napalm bombs. These were fire bombs that burned anything once they were set off into the desired area. By August 2, a week of heavy fighting, the island was secured.

On August 8, all American troops completed the capture of all of the Mariana Islands and surrounding waters. Very soon, however, we would have to continue and fight more in this awful war. I was 27 years old. I wonder what non soldiers thought off all this action on the front lines.