Chapter 29

Okinawa

My name is Henry Lewis. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I was 31 in 1945.

Misty and smoky were probably the best words used to describe the area and island as the boats neared the shores and cliffs. Of course, this is probably because the navy and their aircraft just got through bombarding the island with everything they could offer us. I always did have a fascination for the military and such so I joined as soon as I could when I turned 18. My calling seemed to be for the Marines, and with hard work, I managed to graduate from basic, officer school, and finally achieve the rank of Major.

The downside to all this training and work has leaded me so that I am a military career man and have no wife or children. I am an only child, too, and my parents had passed away nearly ten years ago now from an accident back home. My home is Norway, Michigan in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The small town does not seem like it would cause any sort of accident, but that is what happened sometimes when farming and such is that something will slip and people die. At least they do not have to ever know about this bloody war or that possibly their son will die before them. I do not fear death, but I do fear that my country will not be safe if we had not started to fight these menaces.

Me and my men in the landing craft neared the shores and cliffs, so I ordered them to prepare their gear and be ready to fight. The island was much larger than the other island many men went off to fight at of Iwo Jima. This one is 60 miles long and 8 miles wide, but it was still not as large as most of the islands we had already been tasked to take. To soften the landing, the naval and air forces launched a heavy bombardment, but only until before the actual landing. From what I heard back at headquarters, this was probably to be our final amphibious landing in the war if all went well. To back us up, the U.S. Tenth Army was also part of the landing forces, and on April 1, we invaded the island. Initially, there was no resistance to speak of which surprised all of us tremendously. Intelligence reported, however, that there are 110,000 Japanese defenders and 20,000 Okinawa volunteers.

For almost two months, the island was divided by the northern and southern half with varying styles of fighting and resistance. The airfields in the northern half were taken quickly and easily and all were conquered by the 20th. Also in the north, the fighting was tough but much of it was mainly Japanese suicide attacks. By the end of the campaign in the north, they had inflicted 1,304 casualties before being overrun by the Allied forces. The southern half was a different matter, however. The fighting was much fiercer and more brutal between our two sides. In one valley, equipment was strewn around from both sides, along with their men. The only way you could identify the fallen soldier here was by the material of the clothes they wore.

During this fighting, I received various reports from a Japanese operation happening off of the coasts of the island. This Japanese operation was called Operation Ten’ichigo, but it was generally called Ten-Go. This battle lasted from April 6 through the 7th. Their goal seemed to be to do as much damage to the American fleet or the beaches themselves by their ships becoming shore batteries and the sailors disembarking to become part of the infantry. They also seemed to do this to help their other operation further out the ocean. The fighting began with a charge of 10 Japanese ships opening fire within the fleet. To counter attack, we launched 300 aircraft onto the Japanese forces, and by a few hours, we sunk most of the Japs’ ships.

I received another report from the other Japanese operation called Operation Kikusui that lasted from April 6 until June 22. We continued fighting on the island itself, but it seems a lot more fighting was happening out in the ocean. This operation had 860 Japanese naval vessels and 605 aircraft to attack all the Allied fleets around the island. The Japanese were ruthless in their attacks, causing 10 waves of fire from both ships and planes onto our boys. We managed to end their attacks but not without our own heavy losses. 30 American vessels were sunk, 368 were damaged, and 5,000 sailors lost their lives.

Finally, after both at sea and on land, Okinawa fell to our forces on June 21. Even though we secured the island, we had major mop-up operations, and by the end of that, we killed another 8,975 Japanese soldiers. This was the bloodiest battle I have ever been a part of and the bloodiest I have ever seen. 107,539 Japanese were killed with only 7,455 surrendering to our troops. 42,000 Okinawa civilians were also killed with many of them committing suicide like on Saipan but not to the extent of that island. For the Allies, 7,613 combat Americans lay dead, 31,807 wounded, and another 26,221 non-combat casualties. I was 31 years old. I do hope this bloody war will end very soon.