FATHER JOHN W. SCANNELL

Father John W. Scannell is the most self-effacing individual I have ever known and, consequently, his account of his experiences during the war in the Pacific leave much untold. His devotion to duty, to fellow man, and heroism under fire resulted in several high decorations to include the Purple Heart for wounds received in action.

--Dick Ferriter

FATHER JOHN SCANELL

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ENTRY

It was during July, 1937 that two members of the Colorado Springs Reserve Officer's Association came to the parish rectory of St. Mary's stating that they had no chaplain and asked if I would consider joing the Reserve Corps as a chaplain.

I said that I would take steps to join and thanked them. The physical examination was passed successfully. One obstacle had to be overcome. At that time it was required of chaplain candidated to write a thesis on some ethical question, but I was unable to write the thesis because the pastor of the parish became ill. This meant that two priests had to do the work of three.

However, early in March 1939, I saw the war clouds loom over Europ and I hurriedly wrote the necessary document and forwarded same to the War Department. In July I was informed that my physical exam was passe' and ordered to get another. This I proceeded to do. Finally on Jan 26, 1940, I received my commission in the Army of the United States. I became a First Lt. in the Chaplains' Corps.

Early in March, 1941, I received orders from the War Dept. directing me to report for duty at Camp Callan, California, which was about four miles north of La Jolla. Camp Callan was a brand new camp and I was the first chaplain (later there were eight) to report for duty. It was a Coast Artillery Replacement

Center. Every 13 weeks we received 7,000 men. These were given basic training and sent onto various Coast Artillery posts. The C.A.C. is, of course, a defunct corps. Early in 1943 they converted from the role of Coast Artillery to anti-aircraft. I reported for duty at Camp Callan on March 31, 1941.

Pearl Harbor and Beyond

It would take too long to relate what happened at Camp Callan on "Pearl Harbor Day". About New Year's Day, 1942, I wrote to the Chief of Chaplains and requested overseas duty. As usual, orders were slow in coming. Finally, on April 5, 1942, I went north on a train to the Port of Embarkation at Fort Mason, California, and we sailed for the Hawaiian Islands on April 7.

There were 17 ships in the convoy, including the escort vessels, and it took 10 days to reach Honolulu. (A convoy travels as fast as its slowest ship.) It was April 17 and by evening of the the same day I was in the field, assigned to the 25th Infantry Division and attached to the 35th Infantry.

I was with the 35th at Ewa Plantation for about three weeks when an Assistant Hawaiian Department Chaplain in charge of Catholic Chaplains unceremoniously bounced many of us around. I was transferred to the 19th Infantry, 24th Division, bumping a chaplain who had come over on the same orders! Our mileau was the north shore of Oahu with 1st Bn. Hq. in the Kahuku area. I

remember that one of the First Bn.s duties was to guard Kahuku Air Base.

It was sometime in September that Father Terrence Finnigan, 25th Divison Chaplain contacted me and asked if was interested in returning to the Division. They were short six chaplains, 3 Protestant and 3 Catholic, and the Division would be pulling out shortly for action. I was glad to volunteer because I had become a little tired of the "Rock" and partly because I was still smarting from the original transfer.

Guadalcanal

On November 7, 1942, I reported for duty with the 25th Division and was attached to the 27th Infantry Regiment, the Russian Wolfhounds. (There are Irish wolfhounds, you know). We sailed with the second echelon on December 5 and arrived at Guadal-canal on December 30, 1942. As I recall, six days later on January 5, we relieved the First Marine Divison and began our push on Kokumbona. I remember one of the Marines saying that they had not advanced an inch for four weeks. We rolled up the Japanese flank and took their Hq. and landing beach at Kokumbona in about 15 days.

Let the above suffice for personal history for now.

Diversion

I now treat of something--let's call it a phenomenon--viz., the impulsion of many soldiers to try their hands at poetry. I suppose one would have to say that generally it was second or third class, still sometimes it was very high class. I must have 15 or 20 such poems in my scrap book and I made no special effort to collect such poetry.

One may ask; why are soldiers interested in poetry? No one knows. It may be a time killer; a means of overcoming boredom (ennui); or a means of getting rid of one's gripes. I shall take just three poems: one from World War I and two from WWII.

While sailing from Oahu to Guadalcanal--I believe the ship was the President Cleveland--I got acquainted with convoy chaplain who was a Unitarian minister from Boston. He had amassed quite a library and I spotted a book with the title, "WESTWARD THE COURSE" by Paul McGuire, an Australian. It was quite interesting. I found a poem written by an Australian soldier about Port Darwin on the mid-northern tip of the continent with a very tropical climate. It was written anonymously and there was no title.

This bloody place is a bloody cuss,
No bloody trams, no bloody bus;
No one cares for bloody us,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

The bloody roads are bloody bad,
The bloody folks are bloody mad;
They even say you bloody cad,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

All bloody clouds, all bloody rains;
All bloody stones, no bloody drains;
The Council's got no bloody brains,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

And everything's so bloody dear,
Two and nine for bloody beer;
Can you get it? No bloody fear,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

The bloody dances make me smile,
The bloody bands are bloody vile,
They only camp your bloody style,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

The bloody flicks (movies) are bloody old,
The bloody seats are always sold,
You can't get in for bloody gold,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

The best bloody place is bloody bed,
With bloody ice on bloody head,
And then they think you're bloody dead,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

You note that the soldier had no love for Port Darwin but felt compelled to air his gripes.

The second WWII poem was written on Guadalcanal, anonymously, probably by a Marine. There was no title, but let's call it:

SOMEWHERE

Somewhere in the South Sea Islands
Where the sun is like a curse,
And each long day is followed
By another slightly worse.

Where the coral dust blows thicker
Than the desert's shifting sand
And the white man dreams of a finer
And a slightly cooler land.

(continued next page)

Where Maytag "Charlie nightly
Robs man of blessed sleep;
Where there's no beer or whiskey
To soothe this cursed heat

Somewhere in the blue Pacific
Where the mail is always late,
And even last year's magazine
Are considered up to date.

Somewhere 'neath the Southern Cross
The gooneys moan and cry,
And malaria mosquitoes bite
And wait for us to die.

Oh take me back to Oahu,
The place I love so well,
For this God-forsaken island
Is too damn close to hell!

Again the soldier displays his unhappiness with his lot in steaming jungle land.

Finally we have a classic from WWI, written by a Canadian Infantryman, Major John McCrae. It would be impossible to find a more patriotic poem. Major McCrae must have had a premonition of death because the poem was found in his personal effects after his death. The poem is a perfect rondeau, a very difficult verse form because of its complicated rhyme scheme.

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place, and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

(continued on next page)

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Love and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

Major John McCrae

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One's experiences in the military are truly variegated. Such a wealth of characters, the diversity of backgrounds, the practical jokers, those with a sense of humor--one could go on and on.

I present one case of humor, a practical joke, to show how morale can be strengthened in many ways.

Captain John Dole was Assistant Regimental Surgeon of the 27th Infantry under Major Pohl. One day near the dispensary and sick call tent he ran into an infantry officer, Capt. John (let's call him Brown).

Captain Dole said, "John come here into the tent and let me examine you. "Doc" examined the young officer and said, "John you have worst case of ear lobes I ever saw in my life."

Doc put some salve on the lobes of his ears and wrapped a large bandage around his patient's head.

Men were constantly asking the officer about what the trouble was. We would say, "Doc Dole says that I have the worst care of ear lobes he ever saw in his life."

Four or five days passed before John Brown got wise.

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As God is my witness I pray several times a day for all members of the 25th Infantry Division, living and dead. I thank God that I had the opportunity to be with these brave men. It was my pleasure to serve them. I hope to spend an eternity with my gallant comrades when we enter the real wonder world--the invisible world.

MY STRANGEST WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCE

Lt. Col. Ben Evans, the competent and affable CO of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry--and a true West Pointer-- was given the mission of dislodging the Japanese forces from Arundel Island in the Northern Solomon Islands. Arundel is a small island about three miles off the southwest shore of a much larger island called Kolombangara.

The 27th Inf. Regiment is an old Regular Army outfit and was given the name "Wolfhounds" by the Russians when there were fighting in Siberia in 1921 on the side of the White Army against the Red Army. Their insignia shows the profile of the head of a Russian wolfhound with the Latin motto below: Nec Aspera Terrent," which may be translated as, "Nor do they fear difficult missions." The 25th Inf. Div. was given the name of "Tropic Lightning."

One company from another regiment and division (43rd Infantry Division) had earlier been given the same mission that we were now given, but it was feared that they had been completely annihilated. For some time there had been no contact whatsoever.

The directive from the Commanding General of the 25th Division, Major General J. Lawton Collins, also included the instruction to strive if possible to contact any survivors of the lost company and rescue them.

In World War II, the compliment of a battalion was 1000 me
though all units in the division were slightly overstrength wh
we began the campaign on Guadalcanal. Now the 2nd Battalion h
scarcely 250 men left including two cooks. After the campai
on Guadalcanal and, now, two more months of fighting in t
Northern Solomon Islands, attrition had been heavy due to batt
casualties and tropical diseases, such as malaria, dengu
jungle-rot, dysentery and the like.

Now cooks are infantrymen, too and well trained in the use of
weapons. Since they would not be cooking, they became infant
men. For food we would use C-rations.

Our battalion had been moved about 60 miles from the Island
New Georgia in Higgins boats manned by Navy personnel to
east end of Arundel. We landed on a small peninsula, unloa
our ammo and supplies and dug in for the night after setting
a perimeter of defense.

Since there was no other unit of the regiment at the momen
direct contact with the enemy, I went with the 2nd Battalion
Chaplain. The next morning we were to advance in a skir
line, the men distanced about 8 feet apart, in order that
of the enemy would be left behind us. The only trouble was
the island widened rapidly as we advanced and our right fl
was in a precarious position. All the Japanese had to do wa
around this flank, get in behind us, and we were trapped

asked permission from the CO to accompany the infantry troops and it was granted with a caution to be careful.

It was a beautiful tropical day. One could occasionally see through the dense jungle and huge trees a splotch of blue sky. The temperature was 120 degrees and the humidity 100%.

We had jumped off, as we say, on the 1st of September, 1943, at 0730 hours. About an hour later, the second infantryman to my left asked me to come over. He wished to show me something. He asked, "Do you see the coral snake curled up on the ground?" Due to the darkness of the jungle and because the snake had the same color of the ground which is of coral composition, I had difficulty focusing my eyes. After about 10 seconds I was able to see the serpent. While there are several different species of coral snakes in the tropical world, I am sure that every herpetologist would agree that a coral snake has a very distinctive head. To my knowledge this is the only venemous reptile in the Solomon Islands. The infantryman smashed the snake with the butt end of his rifle and we moved on. I forgot to ask the soldier how it was possible for him to spot the snake in the gloom of the jungle.

We had been advancing for about three hours when suddenly there was a blast of machine gun fire about 100 yds. to my right. We had encountered a Japanese outpost. One soldier was wounded, but not critically, thank God. We continued to advance until

about 1600 hours, when the decision was made to set up a perimeter defense and bivouac for the night. As it turned out, we were only about 100 yards from the main line of the Japanese forces.

The following Thursday in a fierce enemy attack, our front line was breached for about 100 feet. However, we plugged the gap as well as we could, and went on fighting.

The CO knew by this that, very probably, the Japanese far outnumbered us, and he called for reinforcements from Division Headquarters. He also asked for tanks, but the request was denied because Headquarters was of the opinion that tanks could not be used in dense jungle. But Lt. Col. Evans persisted and his request was finally granted. We had no tanks with our division at this time, but General Collins was able to obtain the services of six light Marine tanks, manned by Marines and attached to us.

Our situation was desperate but we held on. It took an entire week for the rest of our decimated regiment to arrive along with the tanks.

We had been fighting for about 10 days, when our communication Sergeant luckily picked up a weak radio message form the remnant of the "lost company." Directions were given and the information was received that there were one officer and 22 enlisted

men left. We were asked to Please try to rescue them.

Our CO formed a squad of about 18 men, armed with BAR's but no machine guns because they would have to travel light and fast and a considerable distance behind enemy lines.

In a brilliant piece of rescue work, the 23 men were found. All returned safely without a single casualty. The men of the "lost company" were very low on rations and ammo. They were forced to bury their one mortar, one smoke shell and ten rounds of live 81 mm. mortar shells. It was feared that the mortar and shells would be found and used against us. This was exactly what happened on the following Sunday.

On Sunday, September 15, the attack on the enemy positions was planned to begin at 1300 hours. Everyone was getting behind trees and into foxholes, awaiting a Japanese counter-attack. I was looking for a large tree and I came upon two corporals who were behind a good-sized jungle tree. They invited me, very politely, to get down between them and I accepted their kind offer. I had barely got down on the ground when a terrific urge in my soul told me that if I remained there I would be killed.

After a minute or two, I was convinced that if I stayed in that spot it would mean death. But what could I say to the two corporals? I had absolutely nothing upon which to base my

intuition. I felt that if explained my feelings they would get the idea that I had gone "psycho", as we used to say when a soldier broke in combat. Two or three days before we had had three men who broke under the stress of battle. I talked to all three. One of these men had received the Silver Star for gallantry in action on Guadalcanal. I remember that the lad was a Catholic. I heard his Confession and he immediately seemed greatly relieved. Anyway, I just could not let the rumor get out that I, the Chaplain, had gone "psycho."

I told the corporals that I wished to talk with an officer behind a tree about 200 feet to the left. On my way I passed an enlisted man in a shallow fox-hole large enough for three men. I was considerably dismayed when I came to the tree that I had chosen for protection. This tree was much smaller than the one I had left and there were already four men behind the tree, including two officers. I must say that I had some regrets about leaving the larger tree. These jungle trees have great supporting roots growing up to the trunk. Oftentimes these roots are so high that one cannot look over the top. It's like being in a tunnel. But this was a young tree and the roots were not more than 18 inches high. I saw that there was one slot left on the right side and the root was high enough to give protection for my head and torso. Only my legs would be exposed to rifle and machine-gun fire.

I had no sooner got into position when the mortar smoke shell

fell into our midst. (The Japanese were right on target. One has to take his hat off to them; they were great soldiers). The Japanese had found the buried mortar and shells. As soon as the smoke shell fell, there followed in rapid succession the 10 shells of live ammunition. I counted them as they fell.

I lay beside a Lt. Wilcox of the 65th Combat Engineers. During the mortar barrage he had been hit by a thin shell fragment in his right wrist. He was not seriously wounded but there was a streamlet of blood. I said, "I've been hit too. I feel warm blood running down my right leg." I had a good laugh when I discovered what had happened. A shell fragment about the size of a dime had pierced the canteen I was carrying on my right hip and the warm water was running down my leg. I had learned on Guadalcanal to always carry two canteens of water, one on each hip. (I was once caught with only a pint of water to last me 36 hours. The Japanese had cut us off from water, and the mountainous terrain was such that the Guadalcanalese helpers were unable to carry water or any supplies to our position because of the intensity of combat.)

There was a lull after the last mortar shell had fallen. Then I heard the soldier I had passed in the shallow fox-hole moaning pitifully for help. I was paralyzed with fear. To my shame I must say that I lacked courage to crawl out alone to the wounded man. This was the only time that this happened to me. Finally, I asked Lt. John Flowe of South Caroline, an infantryman, if he

would crawl out with me. He agreed and we made our way to the wounded soldier.

Immediately all my fear was gone. I stood up and asked Lt. Flowe to stay with the man and I would go for a stretcher. I didn't call for the medics. I knew they would be under cover and I did not wish to disturb them.

I went for the stretcher about 100 yards away, and on my way I passed the two corporals. To my sorrow, both men were dead, literally riddled by shell fragments. I am sure that they were the only men killed by the mortar barrage. My feelings were inexpressible. I went to the aid station, offering a prayer for them as I did so. I grabbed a stretcher and headed back to the wounded man. He had been hit in the middle of the back. It was a bloody wound about six inches in diameter. Lt. Flower and I placed him on a stretcher, carried him to a jeep behind a large jungle tree and told the driver to rush the patient to the rear for medical treatment.

As I pondered what happened I marvelled at how the Lord had spared me. But there was little time for thought. Our tanks began their assault on the enemy followed by the GIs afoot. Within two hours the battle was over. The enemy was routed. The intelligence gathered after the fight showed that the Japanese were 500 strong against our 250, a very bad ratio. The Japanese made one mistake; they did not patrol. Due to the

paucity of our personnel, we could not afford the "luxury" of patrolling.

War brings nightmares. I thank God that my last nightmare came in November, 1969. Before that time they would occur every two or three years. They were always identical, down to the last detail, but they had nothing to do with the events on Arundel Island. The locale was the Island of Luzon and happened a year and a half later.

On this particular day we had had about 125 casualties, one of my worst days in combat. I was so fatigued that I was unable to dig a foxhole. I simply wrapped myself in my blanket and lay down on the ground even though an enemy mortar barrage was expected. It was about 2000 hours. There was a full, very bright tropical moon. About one in the morning I could see an enemy soldier crawling up to stab me. I made a loud cry and awakened. What I saw was one of our own men wrapped in his blanket some distance away, lying on the ground and plainly to be seen under the full moon. That was the nightmare. After that I understood the shrieks I heard during the night on various occasions during combat. The soldiers, too, were having their nightmares.