

July 1970 Reprint

The Navigators Log

Military Ministry Issue

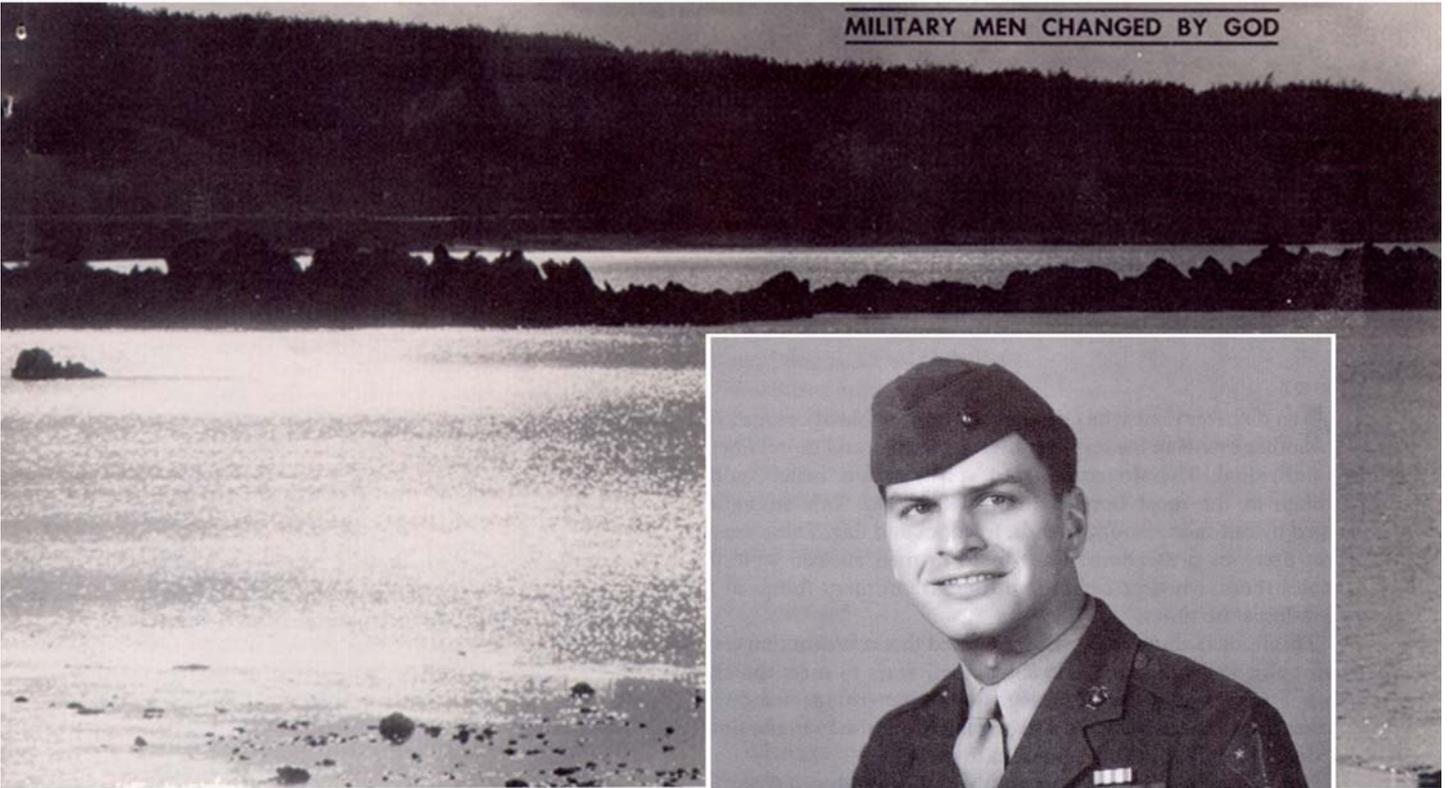


The Marine Who Only Whispers

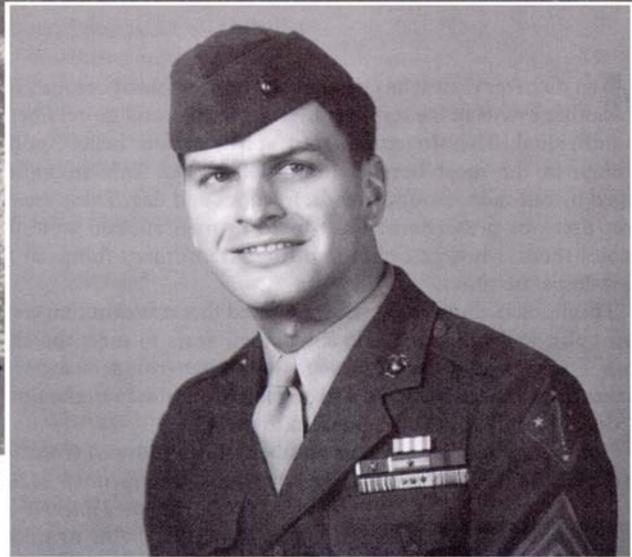
Bob Boardman

Military Men Changed by God

by Monte C. Unger



Bob Boardman (photo at right taken soon after the war) was wounded by Japanese sniper fire on Okinawa. (above).



The Marine Who Only Whispers

By Monte C. Unger

It was a sultry night south of the equator.

1943.

Already a minor skirmish and the Marines still had a major battle facing them.

Private Bob Boardman wasn't afraid of anything. A giant of a man at only 19 and a former lumberjack, he squared off against his opponent without hesitation.

It would be hand-to-hand combat. Boardman hadn't lost many of these. Little did this tough Marine know that before the war would end, he would be wearing two Purple Heart medals and the Silver Star for heroism.

But he lived for the adventure of the moment. And here was battle.

Boardman attacked.

He swung a powerful right-handed haymaker. The air swooshed. His opponent, quick as a gnat, ducked. Boardman missed and his fist shattered a plate glass window.

This violence was not yet Cape Gloucester, Peleliu or Okinawa. No Japanese yet. No Marines racing up the beaches.

This was a street brawl in Australia where the Marines were stationed before going into combat. His opponent was an Australian soldier.

Boardman, his uniform covered with blood, severed tendons in his right wrist. He was taken to a hospital.

A young Marine lying in the hospital, and he hadn't even fired a single shot in combat. He felt miserable, not because of his wound, but because of how he had gotten there and because the other beds were filled with wounded Australian soldiers straight from the battlefields of New Guinea and the Middle East. They had earned their hospital bed. He hadn't.

But he was amazed that the wounded Aussies bore no resentment toward him. They cut his meat for him. They joked and laughed with him.

But beneath his laughing, Boardman was totally dejected. He was at the crossroads of his life, for he had a deep feeling that he would die in combat because of all the bad things he had done. Finally there was something he was afraid of.

He says, "in high school and college I used to pride myself on not fearing anything in athletics or in fights.

I wasn't ready to die. I needed to have some answers to life and death.

And now I thought I was a tough Marine. But I realized I wasn't really tough and that I had come up against someone that I couldn't answer to. That was God. I wasn't ready to die. I needed to have some answers to life and death. I was miserable."

Boardman woke up late one night. All was quiet in the hospital room, except for an occasional groan from a wounded man. The Marine thought of something wrong he had done earlier in the same day he entered the hospital. And, for the first time, this bad deed humiliated him.

He had needed a heel fixed on his combat boot, so he and a buddy went into a shoeshop. The Australian cobbler gave them a toothless grin. The cobbler thought, "Here are some of those Yank Marines that everyone is buzzing about. I'll help the lads out."

The cobbler extended a gnarled shoe-polish-stained hand. He and Boardman shook. "What can I do for you?" the cobbler asked.

Boardman said he needed a heel fixed and took off his boot. While his buddy chatted with the cobbler, Boardman was in another part of the shop filling his pockets with shoe strings, polish and anything else he could conceal. When the cobbler finished, he said, "No charge to you, Yank. This one's on me. Now go out there and win the war."

When the two Marines left the store and Boardman showed off all his loot, they howled with laughter.

Thinking back on this, Boardman nearly wept. Something was happening to him inside.

While in the hospital, he spent much time reading library books. One he particularly remembers. It was about a knight who would pray before going into battle. And God seemed to be with him.

Boardman thought maybe this would help him. He knew only two prayers. They were the Lord's Prayer and the child's prayer which starts, "Now I lay me down to sleep."

He says, "I prayed these two prayers many times each day. I prayed them from the bottom of my heart."

Then Boardman read another book about a tough old man in the north woods of Canada. He believed in "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" and was very bitter about life. But toward the end of the book, a young couple had persuaded the old timer to believe in the message of the New Testament and how Jesus Christ, with His message of love, could change a person.

When the old man believed this message, it did change his life and everything about him.

Boardman says, "So I thought the New Testament could help me. I had a Gideon New Testament which I had never read. A buddy, D. I. Bahde, who had been in the brawl with me, brought me the Bible and I started reading right at the beginning. I continued every day. I was really hungry to know. Day by day God met my seeking heart and began to show me that Jesus Christ was the answer. He showed me that Jesus Christ, whose name I took in vain constantly, was the only one who could really help me. That He was my Savior. That He was a real, living person, raised from the dead by the Father and now living in Heaven, waiting and ready to receive anyone who would respond to His message of reconciliation and love."

Boardman read the New Testament for three months. And sometime during those months, he became a Christian; a new creation in Christ. It was like being born a second time. And in this second birth, he entered into a whole new dimension of living, into the spiritual realm of life . . . all made possible because he now had a personal relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ.

Then the 1st Marine Division moved into combat.

But Boardman now had a source of strength that made him no longer afraid of death. He was a changed man. No more fighting, except against the enemy; no more cursing; and no more godless living.



Cape Gloucester, 1943 – Mud, rain and the terrain were formidable obstacles.



Peleliu's White Beaches at H-Hour, September 15, 1944. At the top is the Point, the extreme left flank of the 1st Marine Division.



Peleliu: Marine riflemen accompanied by tanks push forward into The Horseshoe in an effort to cut off the enemy water supply and rid it of Japanese troops once and for all.

The biggest test of Boardman's new found faith came during his third combat campaign. It was June 17, 1945, on the southernmost tip of the island of Okinawa, just a couple months before the end of the war.

The results of that day are indelibly etched on Boardman's memory and on his body. But would he curse God through it all or would his new faith stand the test?

Boardman was a tank driver. There were only three or four tanks left in a company of 15 by this time.



Okinawa - April 30, 1945. *American landing craft are massed at this strategic island only 375 miles from the Japanese home islands. Okinawa was invaded by US 10th Army troops March 31, 1945. By April 23, US troops controlled more than three quarters of the island and were assaulting the Japanese defense line above Naha, the capital city. Okinawa is the largest of the central Ryukyu (Loochoo) islands, control of which give American forces valuable sea and air bases striking distance of Japan, Formosa, and Japanese positions on the coast of China. (39920-FCG, National Archives).*

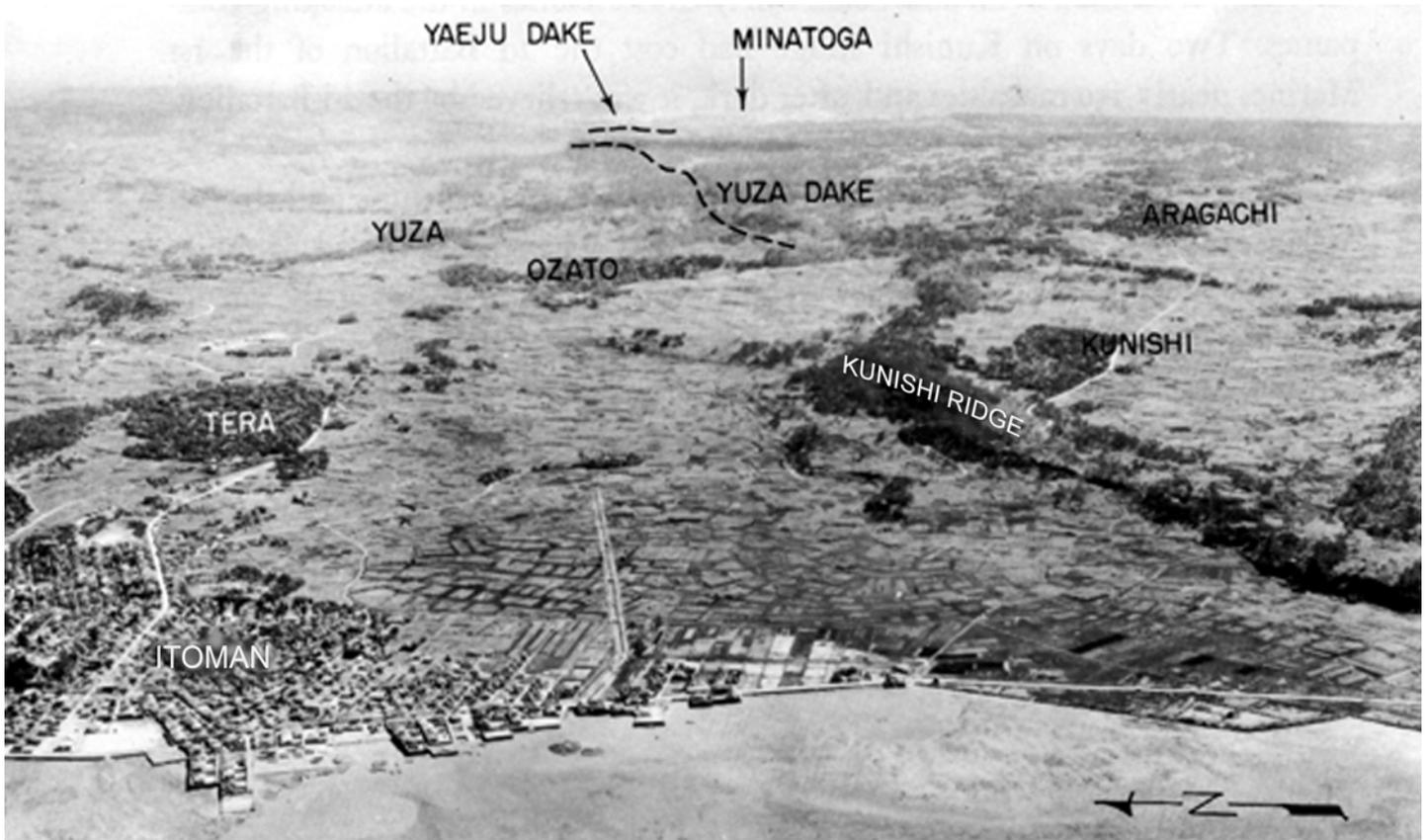
Kunishi Ridge, June 17, 1945 - The Marines were pushing across the last heavily fortified ridge on the island. And the battle was to be the Japanese's last big organized resistance of the Okinawan campaign.

Boardman drove his tank into no man's land.

The tanks sat waiting for a regiment of Marine infantry who would assault the ridge, which had been softened the day before by tank fire and other artillery. There had been no heavy return fire from the Japanese.

The Japanese began firing anti-tank armor piercing shells into the sides of the Marine vehicles. Fortunately, the shells were only armor piercing and not high explosive, or the tank crew would surely have been killed.

The shells penetrated the tank right behind where Boardman was sitting. He tried to turn the front of the tank, which had the heaviest armor, toward the enemy fire. But a track had been blown off and the tank wouldn't turn.



Japanese resistance in the IIIAC zone next centered around the town of Itoman and Kunishi Ridge.

Boardman says, "Then I yelled at the gunner, a fellow from Oklahoma, and told him where the Japanese fire was coming from. Just as he began to move the turret, which held the 75mm gun, toward the enemy, he was killed. The same shell or shrapnel that killed the gunner wounded Lieutenant Atkinson, who was in charge of the tank crew of five. The shell took a big piece of meat out of the lieutenant's thigh. He slumped over his gun."



Overcoming the last resistance. Tanks on Okinawa are shown reducing an enemy position. Center tank was knocked out but was protected from capture by others. Shell bursts mark location of Japanese.

Though the lieutenant was in great pain and the situation very critical, the officer took time to radio headquarters to give their location and ask for help. Meanwhile Japanese shells kept hitting the tank. Boardman says, "The hardest piece of waiting in my life was to sit in that tank not being able to do a thing, having to wait for the order to abandon tank."

In 1942 Boardman had written home to his parents from training camp, *"Don't worry about being taught about trickery from the enemy. We are taught that all the time through our training. We have new classes every day almost. Like evacuation of a wounded man from a tank."*

Boardman and the other two Marines, carrying the wounded officer, evacuated the tank. Just as they got out of the tank and went to the other side to hide from the enemy fire, they looked up and saw three foot flames pouring out of the turret. They had just made it.

The lieutenant was in a state of shock so Boardman, the highest ranking enlisted man as a corporal, took charge. He decided to move away from the tank, which could explode at any moment.

Another Marine and Boardman put the officer between them and began carrying him back to their own lines. They had gone about 75 yards when a Japanese sniper, hiding in a cave, opened fire on the men. The coral cave, flush with the ground, was well camouflaged by nature. There was sugar cane and tall grass around the opening of the cave and the Marines couldn't see where the shots were coming from.

Boardman says, "A bullet went through all three of us. It hit the first man in the chin and drilled a clean hole through the back of the lieutenant's neck, but missed his jugular vein and spine. Then it went through my neck and through my trigger finger."

"It knocked us all down, but didn't knock me out. It was like seeing light, black and then light again. As I began to try to pick myself off the ground - I still hadn't realized that I'd been hit - I saw blood all over my dungaree jacket and on my hand. Then I noticed I couldn't move just right, not the way I should be able to. The lieutenant was lying motionless beside me."

"I looked up and saw the other two young fellows making their way back toward our lines and I tried to yell to them, "Help me," but nothing came out. I remember vividly opening my mouth to yell and I remember the looks on their faces filled with fear. It seemed like we locked eyes for a long time, but I'm sure it was just for a moment. They thought the lieutenant and I were done for, so made their way on. They were just kids, as we all were, but this was their first campaign."

Boardman had written to his parents while in tank training in February, 1943, *"There's a five man crew in each medium tank. We carry .45 caliber pistols. We will probably get to keep them when we are through school here."* Then on March 29, 1943, still in training, he wrote, *"I want to be out sort of on my own with a Thompson submachine gun or carbine or M1 and a .45 pistol and some hand grenades."*

He was alone now, facing the enemy and only with his pistol. Boardman says, "I had a .45 pistol on my hip and knew that the enemy was around somewhere close. As I reached for the pistol, I discovered that my trigger finger was split like a wienie. It hurt, and as far as the pain was concerned, this was worse than anything. If on television you see a cowboy get his trigger finger hit, he won't use that hand any more. I'll guarantee you that."

"I thought about using it with my left hand and then for the first time realized that I was having trouble breathing. Soon taking each breath was like what I imagined drowning to be. Then I figured out that this must be it. We used to talk about the bullet with your number on it. But I had become a Christian about 22 months before this, and a deep peace in Jesus Christ prevailed at this moment."

Boardman had written home in October 15, 1943: *"Every night I pray for you all. And every morning I say a prayer. When the time comes when I need all of my courage and guts I'm sure I will be prepared. I know you have been wondering how I feel that, so I had better tell you now. I believe in God and that's what counts."* He was prepared for this critical time.

Boardman continues about being wounded, "in my simplicity and newness as a Christian, I thought it would be far better to be with the Lord than in my present battered condition. So I sort of laid back and closed my eyes. I tried to pass out and make this it. But I couldn't pass out."

"So I used my left hand to block my jugular vein. I thought it ran down the middle of the neck, so I held my neck there. I didn't know that the jugular vein was on the side."

"I decided to try to get out of there. The lieutenant appeared to be dead. So I began to crawl, holding my throat with one hand. I expected at any moment that a bullet would tear through me. I still had quite a bit of strength left at this time. I crawled up to a road. At this point I had a choice: to crawl back along the road to our lines, which would be a long way; or up a ridge about 150 to 200 yards high. I decided on the rugged, coral ridge. I made the wrong choice. I was part way up and just couldn't go any further."

"I looked back down at the road just as another tank in our platoon came up out of the sugar cane field. I waved to them. But I had done a very dumb thing; several of us had. I had on a Japanese shirt and Japanese hobnail boots. We wore those partly to be salty and also because our own clothes were wearing out. We had been under battle conditions in Okinawa for 78 days. It is very difficult to distinguish friend from foe on the battlefield."

"Fortunately they recognized me. I made my way back down to the tank. We called the driver of this tank Old Man Christiansen. Called him 'Old Man' because he was about 27. I was 21. He stopped the tank. One of his men was dead inside. Christiansen's tank had been hit pretty badly. I made it to the tank. One of the hardest struggles I have ever had was to get up on that tank. By now I was very weak from the loss of blood. But I was desperate and somehow I made it up there and just laid exhausted beneath the gun."

"We got out of there and made it back to our lines. After some first aid I was put on a stretcher and laid on the tank again. We had to go back through another no man's land to get to an aid station. A dead man, wrapped in an orange parachute, lay beside me. He was about 18 years old and looked like he was sleeping. As we went through the no man's land, the tank broke down. Enemy sniper fire began hitting us. Cornelius "Bud" Brenkert, one of my best buddies, got out of the tank and covered my body with his during the shooting so he would catch any bullets aimed at me."

The tank made it safely back to friendly lines and Boardman went into surgery.

In a letter dated June 20, just three days after his injury, Boardman said: *"Dear Mother and Dad, All things work together for good to them who love God. Please do not worry as I trust Him more every day. Jesus Christ is my blessed Lord and Savior."*

Then the nurse added at the bottom of this letter:

"The above message your son asked us to write for him. He is wounded in his throat and cannot talk at present. We held up an alphabet for him and he pointed out these words, and asked us to add a note for him. He is on a hospital ship now being taken to a hospital. We will send another letter as soon as there is an address to which you can write. The doctor cannot say anything very definite about him yet, but some report will be sent to you as soon as possible."

Later the Boardman family received a letter dated June 26, 1945, from a medical officer. It said: *"I wish to inform you that your son, who was wounded on June 17, 1945, is a patient at this hospital. His wounds consist of a gunshot wound of the neck and lacerations of the right hand."*

"He was treated at a field hospital where a tracheotomy operation was done. He was then evacuated to a hospital ship and admitted to this Base Hospital on June 23, 1945. On admission here, he was found to have a complicating pneumonia and he was placed on the critical list of patients at this hospital."

"Since he has been here he has received several blood transfusions, blood plasma, penicillin and sulfa drugs. He responds well to intensive treatment."

"Although there is some improvement in his general condition, he continues to have an elevated temperature of 100 to 102 degrees and he is still seriously ill."

"Your son seems to be in excellent spirits. He is unable to speak but has no difficulty in making himself understood by means of writing. He still requires special nursing care and everything possible is being done to make him comfortable."

"Please be assured that your son will receive the best possible medical care at this hospital. It is expected he will be evacuated as soon as his condition permits and you will be kept informed of his progress."

Boardman did recover to perfect health.

His right index finger was amputated and because of the throat wound, he can speak only in a husky whisper.

In the 1950's Boardman and some of his Marine friends had a reunion. They talked about the time when Cornelius "Bud" Brenkert covered Boardman's body during the Japanese sniper fire.

Of this reunion Boardman says, "I thanked Bud publicly for his part in helping to save my life and then quoted Romans 5:6-8, *While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*"

"Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man - though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' Bud had saved me because we were good friends from boot camp days."

"I then asked Bud, 'Would you do that for me if I was your enemy?' There was a long silence and there were tears in everyone's eyes. Bud couldn't say yes and neither could I really. But this is the difference between the highest of man's love and God's love."

God did send Christ to die for His enemies, and that sacrifice made a permanent difference in this Marine's life.



Boardman (center standing) with some combat buddies.

Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

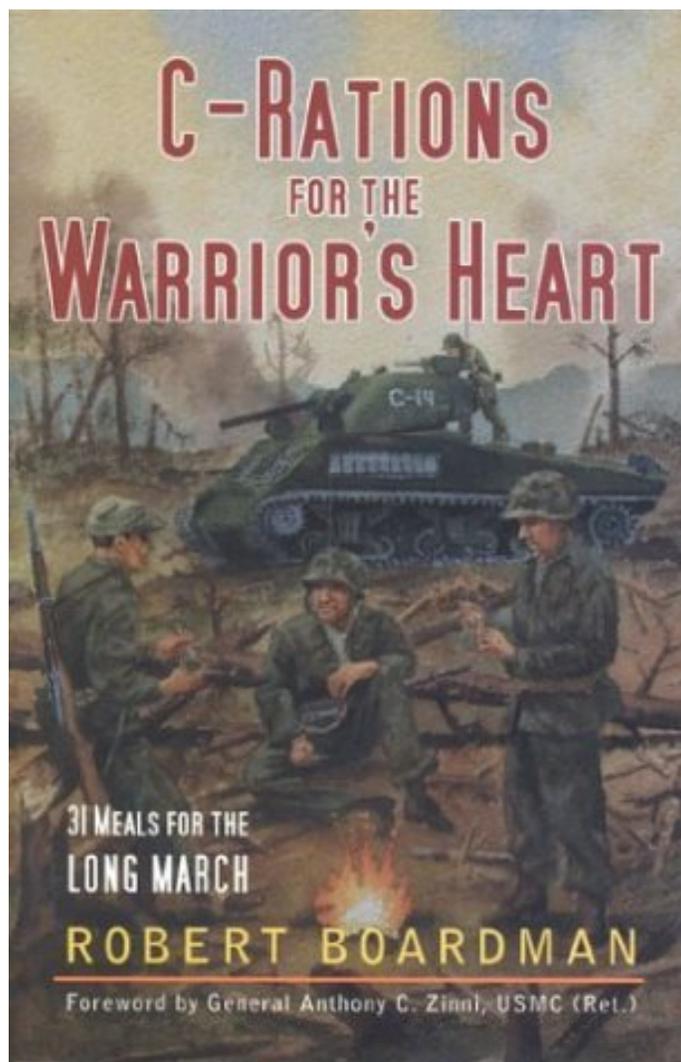
When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.



[C-RATIONS FOR THE WARRIORS HEART](#)

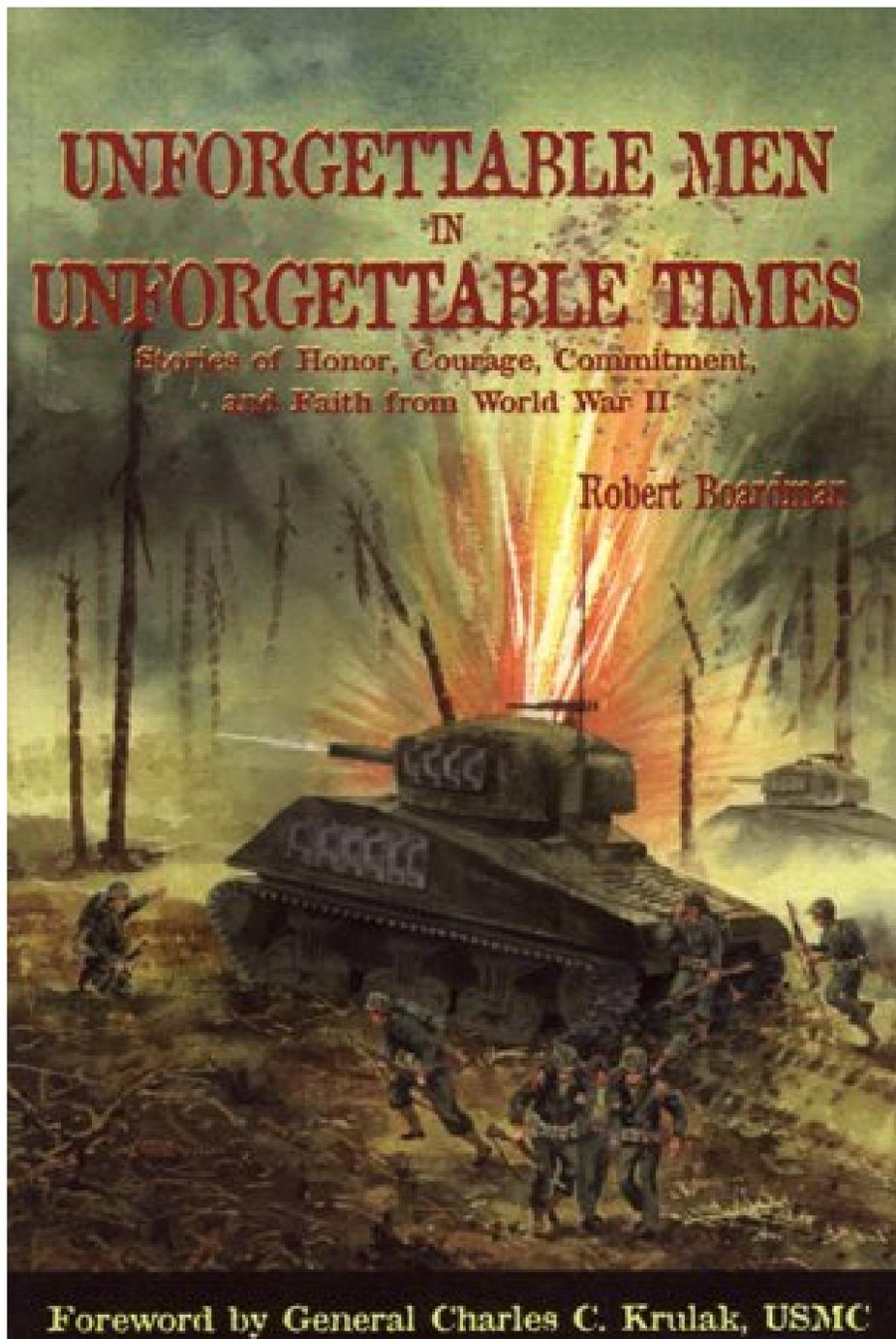
C-Rations for the Warrior's Heart is a collection of combat stories filled with courage, character, and victory. Bob Boardman, author of Unforgettable Times, has once again captured the pathos and trauma of war in telling stories from America's principal wars.

Boardman Features exciting stories of outstanding warriors from various branches of the Armed Forces, many of them decorated and/or wounded. The sacrificial duty and exploits of all these men reveal by example that the principal ingredient in any battle is the condition of the spirit inside a man's heart. These stories are truly food for the inner man – graphic accounts that provide C-Rations for today's great battles and small skirmishes.

“I know Bob Boardman and several of the men who lived the stories in C-Rations. They are not only true, but they reflect and give meaning to their lives today. I challenge you to read just one! I couldn't. I had to keep reading. They are more than mind-gripping accounts – they reveal truths of life when lives are at stake.” – Major General Jerry White, US Air Force Reserve (Ret.); General Director, The Navigators

“Another great book by Bob Boardman, a Marine's Marine, recipient of the Silver Star and two Purple Hearts in World War II. The author weaves a fabric between warriors of many of America's major conflicts. These stories are about men who, when faced with life and death situations and the uncertainty of combat, rose above circumstances and met the challenge. C-Rations for the Warrior's hHeart is a must-read for all who love freedom and America!”

Col. Jim Coy (Ret.), US Army Special Operations

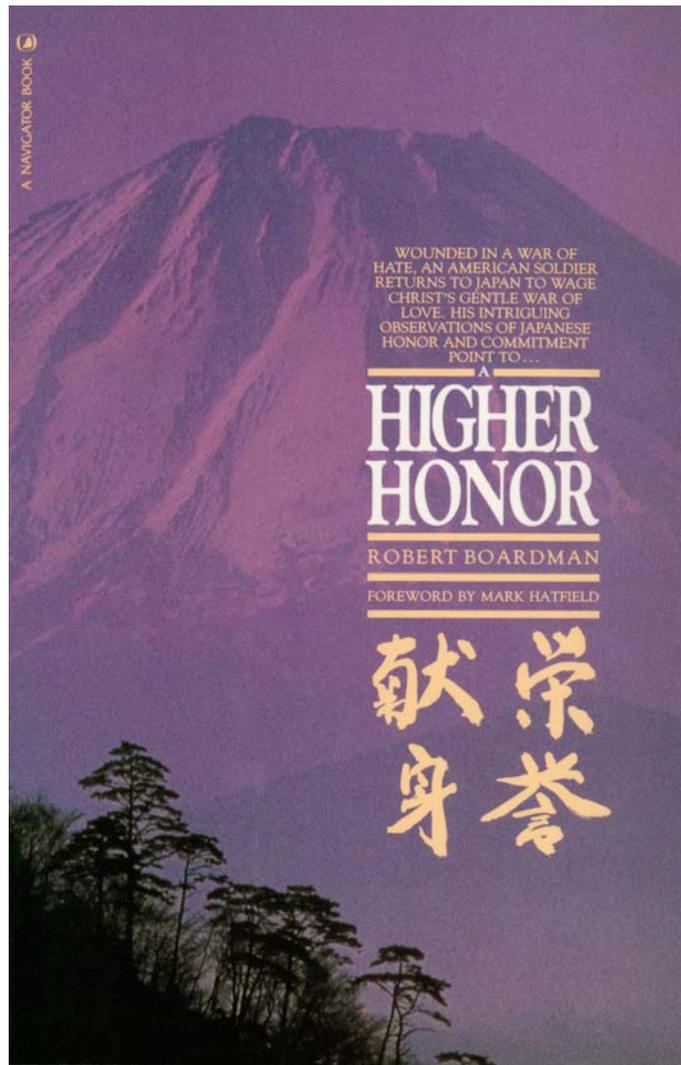


[UNFORGETTABLE MEN IN UNFORGETTABLE TIMES](#)

“Bob Boardman has captured the true fighting spirit and courage of our Marines and sailors as they faced incredible hardships and determined Japanese forces during the Pacific Island campaigns... during World War II. Through Bob's rich personal writing style, which is complemented by his own participation in the battles, he vividly portrays the personal stories that provide the human face to combat.

From Boardman's account you also learn how everyday men responded to this call to arms and faithfully served their nation in its time of need, and more specifically, enhanced the Marine legacy for the legions that follow in their footsteps.”

Lieutenant General Frank Libutti, USMC



[A HIGHER HONOR](#)

Bob Boardman speaks as a man who has stared death down. On June 17, 1945, his tank was destroyed by enemy fire during a brutal battle on the island of Okinawa. As Bob and a few of his friends were seeking shelter from Japanese sniper fire, he was shot in the neck. In the process of being rescued from drowning in his own blood, he renewed his commitment to a God who had not yet chosen to take him off this earth.

In *A Higher Honor*, Bob shows that the greatest challenges facing Japan today are not economic but spiritual. He relates many stories of his own adventures and fascinating accounts of Japanese personalities and customs. He then extracts spiritual insights to challenge our thinking.

A prime example is the account of his return to Okinawa several years after the war. As Bob was standing on that island describing the intense battle that had taken place there, a young Japanese man, who had harbored great animosity toward the Western world, handed Bob a wild lily. This story is a moving portrayal of forgiveness, understanding, and reconciliation.

A Higher Honor is filled with choice vignettes about the honor and commitment of the Japanese people, and about the honor of two nations – America and Japan – who progressed from a time of war to a time of reconciliation and peace. But it is also about an even greater honor found in the Prince of Peace. The full scope of Bob Boardman's understanding of this theme makes this book well worth reading.

Mark Hatfield – United States Senator

Bob Boardman went on staff with The Navigators in early 1947. He and his wife, Jean served 33 years in Japan, followed by a special two-year assignment in Australia.

Bob was born in Salem, Oregon on February 1, 1924. He was 17 when the attack on Pearl Harbor took place on December 7, 1941 and at age 18 joined the US Marine Corps. He participated in three major campaigns with the First Marine Division and received two Purple Hearts and a Silver Star.

Bob's last wounds were in the Battle of Okinawa on June 17, 1945, four days before this last land battle of WWII ended. A sniper's bullet pierced his throat and hand, causing him even today to speak in a husky voice.

Before these South Pacific battles, while in Australia as a young Marine, Bob, under great conviction of wrongdoing as a result of a brawl, began for the first time to read a New Testament received from the Gideons. After reading daily for three months, he put his trust in Christ.

The power of God was experienced in sparing Boardman's physical life in mortal combat in WWII. The grace and love of God were revealed in bringing him to the place where he was willing to go back as a missionary to his former enemy, the Japanese. Bob first went to Japan as a missionary in 1952. He pioneered and led the Navigator ministry in that land for many years until God raised up Japanese leadership. He also helped pioneer the Navigator ministries in Korea and Mongolia.

Boardman has had varied experiences as a logger, athlete, Marine, hospital orderly, missionary, writer and speaker. He is the author of *A Higher Honor*, a book of vignettes about the honor and commitment of the Japanese people. His book, *Unforgettable Men in Unforgettable Times*, is a series of stories of Marines and Navy personnel who fought in those unforgettable times of war in the Pacific against a formidable Japanese enemy. His newest book, *C-Rations for the Warrior's Heart* is a collection of combat stories filled with courage, character, and victory.

His hobbies are woodcarving and photography. Bob attended Oregon State College prior to WWII and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles after the war. Bob and Jean were married in 1953 in Tokyo and all five of their children are "made in Japan." They have six grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Bob and Jean now reside in Seattle ministering locally to professional and businessmen and women, and internationally, especially to Navigator staff and contacts in Asia. Bob serves as chaplain to two US Marine Corps veterans' groups - one for the state of Washington and the other nationwide.