

My dad's (Paul C. Hill, Marine Corp History)

Division: 2nd div 6th Marines

World War II

When the U.S. entered World War II in December 1941, the 6th Marines was temporarily detached from its parent 2nd Marine Division to defend Iceland while assigned to the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. The Brigade was disbanded on 25 March in New York City. The 6th Marines was reassigned to the 2nd Marine Division at San Diego before sailing for the South Pacific. After a brief stay in New Zealand, the 6th Marines landed at Guadalcanal on 4 January 1943 where it was temporarily reunited with the 2nd and 8th Marines. The 6th Marines, fighting as part of a provisional Army-Marine division after the bulk of the 2nd Marine Division departed, participated in the final American offensive on Guadalcanal advancing from Kokumbona to Cape Esperance and eliminating the last remaining enemy forces. The 6th Marines suffered 223 casualties (53 killed in action/died of wounds, 170 wounded in action) during its six weeks on the "Canal".

The regiment then returned to New Zealand to refit for the upcoming Operation Galvanic, the capture of the Gilbert Islands in the Central Pacific. This time the target was Tarawa Atoll. The 6th Marines, once again part of the 2nd Marine Division, was the V Amphibious Corps floating reserve. The assault waves stormed ashore on 20 November 1943 but ran into stiff resistance. Casualties were so heavy that the entire division reserve was committed on the first day. The 6th Marines was ordered ashore the following morning. The 1st and 3rd Battalions landed across Betio's Green Beach and were ordered to drive the length of the island; the 2nd Battalion was used as a blocking force on nearby Bairiki Island. Betio was declared secure after 76 bloody hours. The 1st and 3rd Battalions mounted out for a new rest camp in Hawaii, but the 2nd Battalion stayed on to clear the rest of the atoll. The 6th Marines suffered 355 casualties (99 dead, 256 wounded) and received a Presidential Unit Citation for actions at Tarawa.

Next on the slate was Operation Forager, the capture of the Mariana Islands, which would put American forces within bomber range of Japan. Forager was scheduled for the summer of 1944 with the capture of Saipan and the recapture of Guam set for mid-June and the seizure of Tinian in July. The 6th Marines participated in the Battle of Saipan and the Tinian operation. The regiment landed under heavy fire at Saipan's Red Beach on 15 June. This was the most difficult storm landing in regimental history; two of three battalion commanders were seriously wounded in the first minutes ashore. Early the next morning, the 6th Marines repulsed several tank-supported counterattacks that saved the beachhead. Machine gunner PFC Harold G. Epperson sacrificed his own life by diving on a

grenade on 25 June and received a posthumous Medal of Honor for that action. After that, the regiment drove north up the west side of the island through the coastal town of Garapan and on toward Tanapag where the marines mopped up following the largest Japanese "Banzai" attack of the war. The 3rd Battalion conducted a shore-to-shore landing to seize Manigassa Island that dominated Tanapag Harbor. The regiment spent a couple of weeks clearing out bypassed enemy and concurrently prepared to seize nearby Tinian in July. Saipan was the costliest battle of the Second World War for the 6th Marines: losses were 356 killed, 1208 wounded.

The 6th Marines landed at Tinian on 25 July and joined the rest of the 2nd Marine Division as it elbowed its way down the island until reaching the escarpment that marked Tinian's southern tip on 1 August. It took three days of tough fighting to reduce the final enemy stronghold. During that fighting, PFC Robert L. Wilson covered a live grenade with his body to protect his comrades and earned a posthumous Medal of Honor. The regiment lost 34 killed and 165 wounded in ten days on Tinian.

The 6th Marines returned to Saipan once Tinian was secured. There, the regiment alternated searching for Japanese holdouts, conducting small unit training, and improving habitability while preparing for Operation Iceberg, the seizure of Okinawa which would serve as the final steppingstone on the long road to Tokyo. The 2nd Marine Division was designated the Tenth Army reserve. In April 1945, elements of the 6th Marines were part of the diversion force at Okinawa but returned to Saipan without going ashore. Most of the time at Saipan was devoted to preparation for Operation Downfall, the invasion of Japan. The 6th Marines were slated to land on Kyūshū in the fall of 1945. Fortuitously, that operation was not needed when Japan surrendered in August. The 6th Marines made an administrative landing in Japan for occupation duty in September 1945 and remained there for almost a year before returning stateside.

The most notable literary work about the 6th Marines during the Second World War is probably Leon Uris's best-selling 1953 novel *Battle Cry* which was also made into a film of the same name in 1955.