



## Fighting My Way Ashore on the Japanese- Held Island of Eniwetok

Sgt. Richard Perkins  
Black Hawk, SD

Machine Gun Section  
Leader, WWII

**W**e had to take two major islands of the Eniwetok Atoll with beach landings. You might call that an exciting time, to say the least. Landings are always pretty messy. The first few minutes of the movie "Saving Private Ryan" will give you an idea what a landing is like. The movie was very realistic of the landings I was on. Those first landing craft had no armor and no guns on them. They were just floating tubs used to transport troops inland. In a typical landing one minute before the first wave of landing craft hit the beach, all naval bombardment stops. Everything goes dead quiet. I was in the second wave, and by that time the mortars started popping in rounds.

That first landing was pretty spooky because I didn't know what to expect. Right after jumping out of the landing craft into the water and making my way to the beach, a mortar round struck a Marine right next to me dead center. It was a terrible thing, and all I could think of was welcome to the war.

We started to move up a little and there was a hole in front of us. I dumped a grenade in the hole, and up popped a Japanese soldier like a jack in the box. The

grenade didn't kill him, and he almost stepped on my head. I took care of him and again, welcome to the war.

One night we spotted a great big dump of wooden crates, so instead of digging a foxhole in the coral we decided to crawl up amongst the boxes and get some shut eye. The next morning we were curious what might be in the boxes, which had Japanese writing on them. We pulled a lid off one crate, and to our surprise it was full of dynamite. This was the first dynamite bed I had ever heard of. If something would have touched them off we would still be traveling, if you know what I mean.



## Letter Home to My Wife, early 1944, from the South Pacific

Sgt. Richard Perkins, Black Hawk, SD  
US Marine Corps

**I** am finally getting around to writing to you again. I have been skipping from Island to Island here lately so fast that we have not been settled long enough to write or any thing else. We will perhaps just be at our present location a very short time and from here only the Lord and the Colonel have any idea where.

It seems that the Japs are on the run now and Uncle Sam don't intend to stop chasing them. I guess you can get a fair guess at where I will be from now on just by following the news. The only thing that I am permitted to say is that I was in action on Parry and Engebi Islands in the Marshall group. I sure have a lot of sea-going time to my credit now and needless to say I still get seasick and hate the ships as bad as ever.

I have given up all hope of getting back to the States this summer. It looks like I will be over here for the duration if I can dodge bullets that long. It is two years now since I saw Randy [his young son] and it will soon be two years since I last saw you. I have twenty-one months of overseas time now...

I suppose you are a bit curious as to just what I thought of combat but there really isn't much I can say except that to say it is horrible is putting it mildly. I had the holy hell scared out of me a few times but so did everybody else. I had the satisfaction of disposing a few of the yellow bastards to the infernal regions. They are the most barbaric creatures that one could ever imagine. They will never surrender and they continue to fight till the last one is killed. The worst part is at night when one has to lay absolutely quiet all night in a foxhole peering over the edge of the hole into the darkness, trying to spot the Japs that try to sneak through the lines. It is sure a long, lonesome way to spend the night. Usually bullets and shell fragments fly around all night and then it always rains a bit so a fellow don't know quite for sure whether his is shaking from the cold or partially of fright. All in all it is a rather rough way to earn a living but I can't complain as I have been very fortunate in that I have received no injuries and physically I never felt better in my life.

I am sending you some more Jap money. I sent four bills in the last letter but maybe you didn't get it as mail service is in a rather primitive setup out here at times. I will also send that Jap wrist watch as soon as I can. It really is a nice little watch and the Mongol didn't mind giving it to me at all. The money also represents Jap charity.

I appropriated a lot of their gear including a mortar, field glasses and a bayonet but some Marine relieved my of the glasses and bayonet while I wasn't looking...

I look like a native now as I have a real sun tan. All I wear is shorts and shoes. I swim in the ocean about an hour every night. Most of these Islands have no fresh water so bathing and laundry is a rugged problem in this salt water. I solved the laundry problem by wearing practically no clothes but bathing is a pain. A person's hair gets so it won't hardly comb and the dirt almost refuses to come off in salty water.

The heat here is terrific but where I am now there are no mosquitoes. However there are countless millions of flies and huge ants that attack in formation.

You would really laugh at the bed I made out of sticks and camouflage tape but it does the job and it is the envy of the entire platoon. The bad part about sleeping on the ground is that the ants and land crabs invariably move right in with a man at night.

*Note on Richard Perkins: Longtime resident of Black Hawk, SD, known far and wide for wood and metal-working and fix-anything skills, he farmed for years in the Palouse region of Washington, and saw action as a machine-gun section leader in the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Guadalcanal, and Kwajalein, sometimes in the same operation as Rapid City's Loyd Brandt. Perkins had a keen eye for comic interludes in the day-to-day life of Marines in combat. He designed a light-weight machine-gun mount later in the war.*

*Perkins volunteered for combat. "He had a farm," wife Sylvia said, "and didn't have to join." Along with photographs, letters home from a combat zone often form the two memory supports that make the writing of later memoirs possible.*