

OKINAWA FIRST PERSON UNIQUE COMBAT STORY

Richard (Dick) Hagland

Apologies for the term "unique", so many incidents on Okinawa were unique as you may have experienced them.

We (381st Co. E) along with other units, were on the Nagausuuku Bay side of Okinawa; the opposite side from our original beachhead and renamed by our forces as Buckner Bay. We, along with other units, were working to silence Japanese artillery gun positions that were emplaced in the cave openings and other concrete-lined gun positions facing us.

We had the U. S. Navy firing for us from their ship. They were as close to the beach as a safe depth would permit. Also the angle of fire was more effective in that the Japanese emplacements were not protected from this angle and counter fire from their guns was difficult if possible.

Our company, like other 96th units, was composed of a mixture of men from various places. Plainsmen from the prairies, farmers from the Midwest, mountain area foresters, factory workers, college students, all education levels, and many more backgrounds. This was helpful in that the mixture of environments made it likely that someone would notice something not natural to his background. The Japanese were very skilled at camouflage on Leyte and on Okinawa. Their offensive weapons were not always spotted until they began firing.

The "luck of the draw" happened to assign the naval forward observer to "E" Co. 381 persons who were familiar with saltwater tidal environments: Sgt. H. Sullivan of E Co Weapons Platoon and R. Haglund, Communications/Messenger of the first Platoon, Company E. "Sully" had grown up in Seattle, a seaport, and Dick had grown up in Tacoma; an adjoining seaport. They were very familiar with a saltwater environment, tidal action and so on. Their assignment was to assist with telephone and radio communications from our offensive team, as well as assist in spotting firing impacts and relaying to our Naval observer as well. We were equipped with powerful binoculars helpful in observing.

The weather was sunny and only a slight breeze was noted. From our position on a ridge we could see the beach about a quarter mile from us. Low tide had littered the beach with flotsam. Prominent were two huge logs, utility pole size or bigger. Sully and I wondered why these logs were perpendicular to the beach -- not a way the tide would act. We surveyed them with our field glasses and saw nothing uncommon,

Soon the tide began to come in and the beach debris started to flow shoreward. However, the two gigantic logs began to float out against the tide. Sully and I focused our glasses on the logs. and noted a small white wake at what would be the stern end of the logs. We informed our naval observer, who called the ship that fired on the logs which were loaded with explosives. The Navy said if they had received the warning any later, they would not have been able to depress their guns any lower, and the logs could have done much damage to the ship and crew.

Would someone not brought up in a salt-water environment notice that tidal movement?