

WILLIAM DOUGLAS LANSFORD (1922–2013)

US Marines



(Image: From the Collection of *The National WWII Museum*, OH.1471.)

William Douglas Lansford, whose mother was from Juarez, Mexico, grew up in a Spanish-speaking household in Los Angeles. He struggled in school and dropped out at 16 to become a lumberjack with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a New Deal program that hired young men to work on projects such as forest preservation, flood control, and national parks.

After his stint with the CCC, Lansford tried to join the US Navy but was told he was too small. Then, in October 1940 at the age of 18, he enlisted in the US Marines. Lansford volunteered for what was advertised as exotic overseas duty in hopes of going to China, but he ended up in Iceland instead.

Back in the United States following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lansford learned that Marine Corps Major Evans Carlson was recruiting what some referred to as a “suicide battalion” that would run special operations behind enemy lines. Eager to join this elite unit, Lansford and a friend snuck out of camp to find Carlson and volunteer. Threatened with court-martial upon his return to camp, Lansford nonetheless secured a spot in Carlson’s 2nd Marine Raider Battalion.

With the Raiders, Lansford underwent months of specialized training before heading into battle in the Pacific. He first entered combat in early November 1942 on Guadalcanal, where he participated in the “Long Patrol,” a monthlong operation behind Japanese lines in and around the upper Tenaru River and upper Lunga River. Suffering from jungle rot and starvation following the raid, Lansford and his fellow Raiders recuperated in New Zealand before returning to combat in the fall of 1943 at Bougainville.

Lansford returned to the United States after the 2nd Raider Battalion disbanded in February 1944. But unable to adjust to civilian life, he rejoined the military to train US Marine machine-gunners at Camp Pendleton. He then shipped out for Iwo Jima, where he served with a field-intelligence unit and was wounded by fragments from a Japanese mortar round.

After the war, Lansford worked as a Hollywood screenwriter and published books and articles on World War II and Latino history. His Hollywood credits include episodes of *Bonanza*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *CHiPs*, *Fantasy Island*, and *Starsky & Hutch*.

In his oral history from 2010, Lansford describes his experiences on Iwo Jima.

CHARLES WILLIAMSON'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE

US Marine Corps Major Charles Williamson wrote the letter below to his wife in New Orleans shortly after the conclusion of hostilities on Iwo Jima. At the time, his wife was pregnant with the couple's third child.



(Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, Gift of Winnie Brown, 2014.156.)



Letter No 5

April 1st, 1945

Dearest Laure -

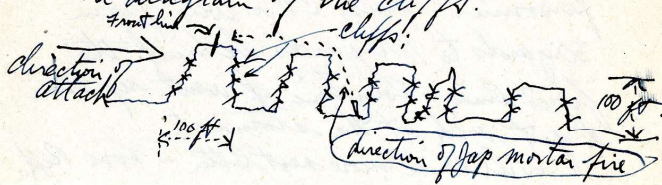
After we went into the line on the western side of the island, the regiment stayed in continuously from the 10th or 11th day until the 35th day.

The casualties were very high. The land looked like a section of the moon. It is impossible to describe the ruggedness of the cliffs and land on the northern half of the island. From about the middle of the island to the northern end on the west side, the cliffs ran diagonally across the front of our lines. There was a cliff about every 40 to 50 yards. They averaged ~~and~~ about 100 feet in height and were made of hard sulphurous clay - a dirty yellow in color.

There was no vegetation on them, and the bombs, artillery shells, and naval gunfire shells had knocked off large chunks of this rocky clay. On each side of one of these cliffs were unnumerable caves. Some of these cliffs had as many as 40 caves on each side. Some of the caves went down 50 or 60 feet and the Japs had carved out large rooms down there - some of them were 40 or 50 feet square. Most of the caves were connected with several others by tunnels. All of these caves had Japs in them. It was impossible to get them out with artillery or mortar fire. The only way our men could advance was for fire teams to fire continuously into the mouth of the next cave while flame thrower men worked their way to it to burn them out. This was

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followed by demolition teams who made their way to the cave with TNT charges and blew up the cave mouths, sealing off the gaps in them. Most of the time the caves were situated so that gaps could cover each other. In that case our men had to work on several caves at the same time. Then the gaps would run through the tunnels and out into the caves on the other side of the cliffs, and when our men reached the high ground of the cliff ridge they had to fire on caves on the opposite cliffs while they worked their way down the reverse slope of the cliff they were on to get at the gaps below them. Here is a diagram of the cliffs:



There was no other way to accomplish this.

I did not go up to the front lines any more than I had to. It was frightful there. Every few days I went up with Col. Williams - but not any more than I had to. Bullets came from every direction up there - through crevasses in the rocks, and the gaps were constantly lobbing mortar shells and bazooka mortars over from behind the next line of cliffs. I used to go up to the Battalion supply distributing points every day. They were 200 to 400 yards back. Once in a while I would go up to the company command posts with the Battalion supply personnel. These CP's were from 30 yards to 100 yards behind the front lines - Every time I went up there I got sick at the stomach - I will write more next letter - Love Red.

(Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, 2014.156.040.)

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[See scan of original image for Williamson's diagram (page 78).]

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I did not go up to the front lines any more than I had to. It was frightful there. Every few days I went up with Col. Williams—but not any more than I had to. Bullets came from every direction up there—through crevases [sic] in the rocks, and the Japs were constantly lobbing mortar shells and knee-mortars over from behind the next line of cliffs. I used to go up to the Battalion supply distributing points every day. They were 200 to 400 yards back. Once in a while I would go up to the company command posts with the Battalion supply personnel. These CP's were from 30 yards to 100 yards behind the front lines – Every time I went up there I got sick at the stomach—

Will write more next letter – Love Red.

HOWARD N. MCLAUGHLIN MEMOIR

Howard N. McLaughlin Jr. participated in the Battle of Iwo Jima as a member of the Repair Section (Heavy Equipment) Headquarters and Service Company of the 5th Engineer Battalion, 5th Marine Division. While he and his fellow mechanics did not expect to go ashore on Iwo Jima if the Marines' landing went smoothly, he ended up joining the battle on the island almost immediately.

McLaughlin recounted his experiences on Iwo Jima in a memoir he self-published in 1991. In the excerpt below, McLaughlin discusses the US Marines' feelings toward the Japanese, whom they often derisively referred to as "Japs." "In the eyes of most Marines," McLaughlin wrote, "they neither liked or hated the Japanese. They killed them without anger or mercy. To them they were part of the forces of evil that had to be destroyed. In reality, the Japs were no worse than evil forces elsewhere, whether in Germany or Russia or at home." He continues on this theme below.

But the Pacific war was the 'right kind of war', a simple war in which there were not the distraction of things like pity and the Geneva convention. It was a war that did not require hatred, although hatred was neither forbidden nor condemned. In fact the whole psychology of the Pacific war allowed one perfect objectivity to those in the act of shooting down Japanese soldiers in a Banzai charge or pouring high-octane gasoline into Jap tunnels and tossing in a lighted match.

This idea of a 'right kind of war' is an idea quite foreign to most Americans .. but to practically all Americans, the Pacific war was the dirty war .. they felt the Americans fighting it were to be pitied and appreciated, even admired, more than those battling the Germans and Italians on the other side of the world. Back home, they saw the Japs as yellow devils .. slant eyed and alien. The German and the Italians with the exception of Hitler and Mussolini and a few of their vicious followers, looked and acted and sounded like our neighbors across the street.

But in the Pacific you're talking about both sides fighting the 'right kind of war'.

I'll tell you exactly what is meant by that. In the kind of war we were fighting with the Japs, there was no favoritism. Everyone gets what is coming to him. In Europe a German machine gunner kills ten of our men and then when things get too hot for him, he hangs up a white flag and comes out with his hands up. Even though the son of a bitch is a member of the Nazi party and has killed your brother and your best friend, you're supposed to pat him on the head, hand him a ration of Texas steak and give him a free ride to a stockade way back out of range of his own artillery.

The next thing you know he's in Louisiana cutting cane or in Illinois picking sweet corn. Then when the wars over, he'll apply for American citizenship, grab one of our girls, have a family, and then sit back, relax and enjoy the beer. All the time your friends are six feet under and missing all the fun.

Out in the Pacific when the Marines hit the beach, that Jap machine gunner knows he's dead. He might last thirty days and kill twenty Marines, but when we land on his island he knows he's a dead man. We're going to get him sooner or later, and it ain't no use for him to come out with his hands up either. If he does, he gets five slugs in the guts, if he holds out, he gets fried with a flame thrower.

There aren't any Japs cutting cane in Cajun country.
That's what was mean by 'the right kind of war' ...

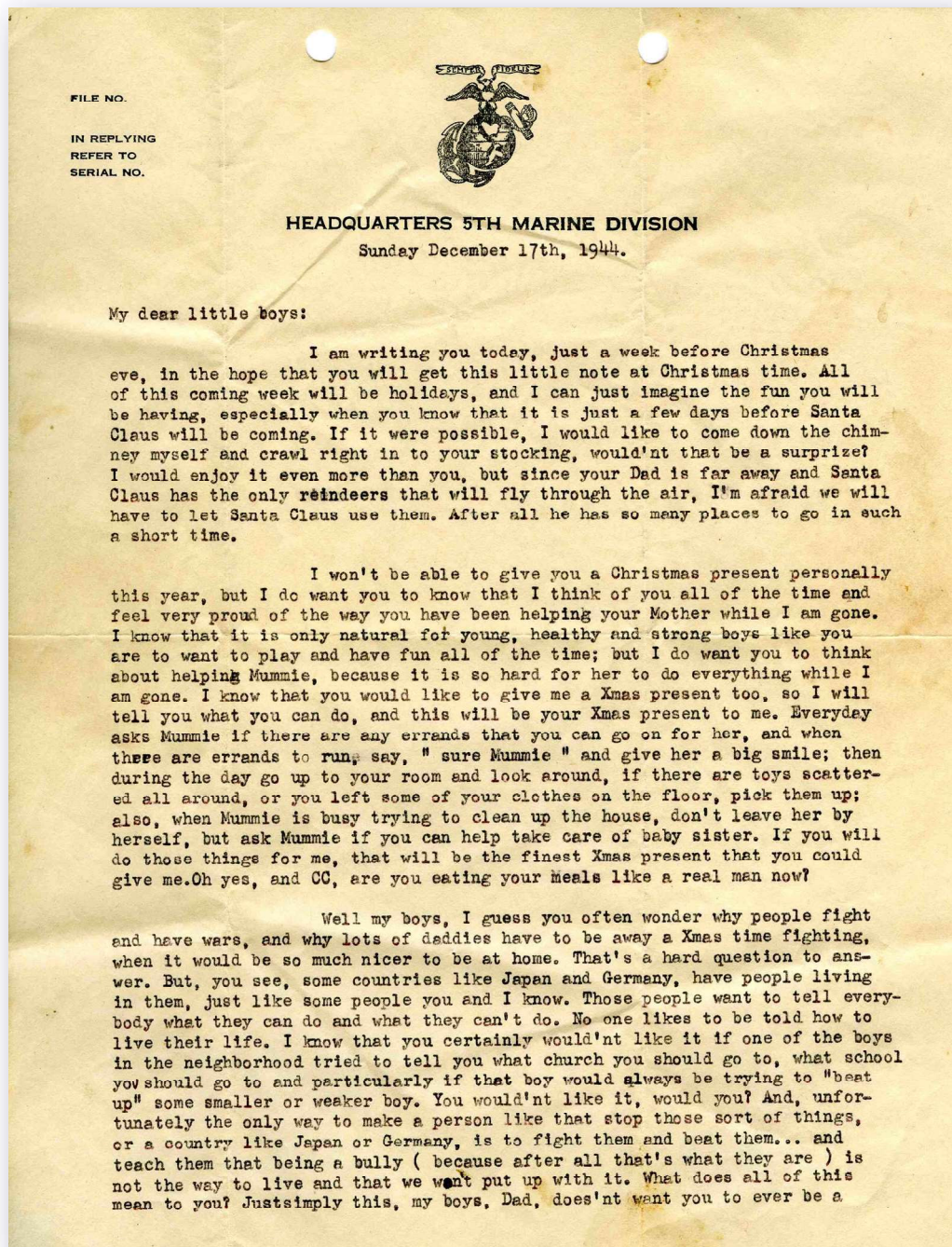
The Japanese way of war had been at first fantastically different, yet those of us that fought in the Pacific for any length of time quickly came to respect their concept of war ... it was a war waged without mercy, a war in which those that surrendered were executed by their captors as spineless cowards and traitors to their own cause ... a war that increasingly dictated the use of dumdum bullets and flame throwers, napalm bombs and possum patrols. It was a war without privilege or favoritism, a war in which admirals and generals were killed as quickly and as objectively as Marine privates or sailors of the meanest rank.

(Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, Gift of Howard N. McLaughlin Jr.)

LEONARD ISACKS' LETTER TO HIS SONS

New Orleans native Leonard Isacks Jr. wrote the letter below to his two sons on December 17, 1944, while stationed at 5th Marine Headquarters near Hilo, Hawaii. Two months after writing the letter, he was among the Marines who invaded the Japanese-held island of Iwo Jima.

While crouching in a foxhole near the beach on the second day of the invasion, Isacks was seriously wounded by Japanese mortar fire and evacuated to an offshore hospital ship. He died the following day and was buried at sea. He was 34 years old.





*Marine First Lieutenant Leonard Smith Isacks Jr.
with his two sons in New Orleans.
(Image: Gift of Fletcher Isacks, 2001.038.)*

bully, I want you to always fight against anyone who trys to be one; I want you to always help the smaller fellow, or the little boy who may not be as strong as you; I want you to always share what you have with the other fellow; and above all, my boys have courage, have courage to do the things that you think are right. Never be afraid to fight for what you think is right. To do those things, you need a strong body and a brave heart; never run away from someone you may be afraid of; if you do, you will feel ashamed of yourself and before long you will find it so easy to run away from the things that you should stand up, and fight against. If you and lots of other boys try to do the things that Dad has been talking about in this letter, it may be that people will not have to fight wars in the years to come and then all of the Daddies in this world will be home for Christmas and that is where they belong. Perhaps, some of the things that I have been talking about,... you don't quite understand, if you don't, Mummie will explain them to you, as she knows.....

A Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year... God Bless you,

Daddy

(Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, 2001.038.002 a.)