ACCOUNT OF FIGHTING ON GUAM ISLAND

Guam, the biggest and southernmost of the Marianas, was the last to be taken. A Guam assault by the 3rd Marine Division had been scheduled for mid-June 1944, but when enemy resistance on Saipan turned out to be a lot stiffer than had been expected, the 3rd Division was held in reserve and the Guam D-Day put off until July 21. As a result, the Marines sat it out on board their ships for more than 50 days. The landing on Guam was brought off with expert smoothness, nonetheless. But on the night of July 25, the Japanese struck back with a wild, drunken suicide rush, described here by Sergeant Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., a Marine Corps combat correspondent on Guam.

At about three AM a rifleman named Martinez heard a swishing of grass out ahead of him, like men moving about. Then he noticed the pang of pieces of metal hitting each other and a busy stirring in the darkness that made him uneasy. He peered into the mist but unable to see anything. Then, as he listened, other things happened. A barrage of hand grenades flew through the darkness and exploded behind him. They kept coming, and he noticed mortal shells beginning to crash more frequently on the ridge. He woke the other two men in his foxhole. They had been curled in their ponchos, and they got to their feet uncertainly. At the same moment an orange signal flare shot up from the Japanese lines. A singsong voice shouted into the night, and an avalanche of screaming forms bounded suddenly into view. With their bayonets gleaming in the light of sudden flares, they charged toward the Marine foxholes, throwing grenades and howling: "Ban-zai-ai!" like a pack of animals.

The Marines awoke with a start. Along the ridge, wet, groggy men bolted to their feet and grabbed their weapons. Grenades exploded like a crashing curtain against the onrushing Japs. A man on a telephone yelled for uninterrupted flares, and flickering lights began to hang in the air like giant overhead fires.

All along the line the enemy attack was on. Red tracer bullets flashed through the blackness. Japanese orange signal flares and American white illumination shells lit up the night like the Fourth of July, silhouetting the running forms of the enemy. On the right and the left the attack was stopped cold. As fast as the Japs came, they were mowed down by automatic rifles and machine guns. The enemy assault gradually focused on a draw where some American tanks were parked. The tanks fired their 75s at the charging masses. At first the Japs attacked the steel monsters like swarms of ants, firing their rifles at the metal sides and clambering up and over the tanks in a vain attempt to get at the crews inside. They screamed and pounded drunkenly on the turrets and locked hatches, but in their excitement they failed to damage a single tank. Finally, as if engaged in a wild game of follow-the-leader, many of them streamed past the tanks, down the draw toward the beach.

The rest, cringing before the tank fire, moved to the left, hoping to break through our lines and get to the draw farther down the slope of the ridge, behind the tanks. The front they now charged was that of B Company. Here, against the 75 men, the full force of the Japanese attack broke.

In their three-man foxhole, the rifleman Martinez and his two companions had maintained steady fire directly ahead, diverting the first rush of Japs to other sections of the line. During a pause in the fighting, one man left the hole to go back for more hand
grenades. Martinez and a Marine named Wimmer were left alone. Around them they saw some of the other Marines withdrawing.

Trying to decide whether to withdraw themselves, Martinez and Wimmer were confronted suddenly by the first wave of Japs. With bayonets fixed, the enemy came more slowly, throwing grenades and then falling to the ground to wait for the bursts. The first grenades exploded around the Marines without harming them. Then one shattered Wimmer’s rifle, and the two men decided it was time to withdraw.

As they crawled out of their foxhole and ran and slid down the slope of the ridge, they noticed a group of screaming figures pour over the crest farther to the right and run headlong down the hill. It was the first indication that the enemy were breaking through. Now Japs would be in our rear, and it would no longer be easy to tell friend from foe.

Martinez and Wimmer reached their platoon command post – an old shellhole ten yards from the top of the ridge, held by Second Lieutenant Edward W. Mulcahy. When the two Marines reached him, Mulcahy was trying desperately to make his field telephone work; but the wires to the rear had already been cut by mortar shells.

Wimmer slid into the hole beside the Lieutenant, and Martinez lay on the forward lip of earth as protection with his rifle. The night was hideous with explosions, lights, screaming enemy, and the odor of sake. Against the skyline a handful of Japs appeared. Martinez fired at them, and they backed out of sight. A moment later a string of hand grenades rolled down toward the Marines. Though most of them bounced harmlessly by to explode behind them, one blew up in front of Wimmer’s face. Fragments shattered Mulcahy’s carbine and struck him on the left side of the head and body. It felt as if he had been slammed with a two-by-four plank.

When he regained his breath, he saw Wimmer holding out his pistol.

“You take it, Lieutenant,” Wimmer said in a strange voice.

The Lieutenant protested. The enlisted man would need the weapon for himself. Wimmer raised his head and smiled. “That’s all right, sir,” he breathed. “I can’t see any more.”

The shocked Lieutenant tried to bandage Wimmer’s splintered face. The noise from the top of the ridge showed that Marines were still up there, fighting back. It gave the three men hope. The Lieutenant began to shout in the night, like a football coach. “Hold that line, men! You can do it!”

The Marine line on the crest, however, had by now disintegrated into a handful of desperate knots of men, fighting together with the fury of human beings trying not to be killed.

Action around the two heavy machine guns was typical of what was occurring. A Jap grenade hit one gun, temporarily putting it out of action. The crew members fixed it quickly and started firing again. A second grenade hit the gun’s jacket and exploded, knocking off the cover and putting it completely out of the fight. The same blast wounded one of the men. His three companions moved him to a foxhole ten yards behind the shattered gun. One man jumped in beside him, and the other two ran back to the machine-gun foxholes with their carbines. Heaving grenades like wild men, they managed to stall any Jap frontal charge for the moment.

Meanwhile, the other gun was also silenced. Riflemen in foxholes near by heard a sudden unearthly screaming from the gun position. By the wavering light of flares, they saw one of the crew members trying to pull a Japanese bayonet out of another
Marine’s body. The same instant a wave of Japs appeared from nowhere and swept over both men. Three of the enemy, stopping at the silent machine gun, tried to turn it around to fire at the Marines. In their hysteria, one of them pulled the trigger before the gun was turned, and the bullets sprayed a group of Japs racing across the top of the ridge. Finally the Japs tried to life the entire gun on its mount and turn the whole thing. A Marine automatic rifleman blasted them with his BAR, and the Japs dropped the gun. Two of them fell over the bodies of the Marine crew. The third pulled out a grenade and, holding it to his head, blew himself up. A moment later another band of Japs appeared. Again, several paused at the gun and tried to swing the heavy weapon around. They had almost succeeded, when from the darkness a lone, drunken Jap raced headlong at them, tripped several feet away over a body, and flew through the air. There was a blinding flash as he literally blew apart. He had been a human bomb, carrying a land mine and a blast charge on his waist . . .

At about 0600, three hours after the enemy attack had begun, a last wave of Japs charged over the top of the hill. It was the wildest, most drunken group of all, bunched together, howling, stumbling and waving swords, bayonets, and long poles. Some were already wounded and were swathed in gory bandages. The Marines yelled back at them and chopped them down in their mad rush. In a moment it was over. The last wave of the three-hour attack died to a man.