

THE LADY FROM THE CAVE

Okinawa 1945

While serving in the First Marine Division in the WWII battle of Okinawa the following event took place; a remarkable story that turned out well. I was a young nineteen year old telephone lineman attached to a Forward Observer Artillery Team.

The day was nice and we were situated on a flat top hill with the East China Sea to our right. A long slope with Okinawan farms and small thatched roof houses were situated on the long gentle slope.

We were scheduled to move up to the front line with the 7th Marines. Time was running short as we had about 45 minutes left. Then another Marine came running up the slope and told us that there was a large cave about a 1,000 feet down on the right side hill. My buddy and I asked our officer for permission to examine the cave. He gave us the okay with words to the effect, "Don't stay too long or your butts are going to be in trouble.

We then went down, found the cave and entered it to investigate. It was very dark with only light from the opening. It was full of boxes and items stored there for safe keeping. We sat on boxes and began to look at things. Then as my eyes adjusted to the light I saw directly in front of me a pair of hands not two feet away. My instant thought it was a Jap and we could be dead meat.

We then exited the cave on a run, went back up the hill and contacted an Infantry squad with a young lieutenant. They came down to the cave, surrounded it and threw in a smoke grenade. We then heard coughing and gasping. Out came two old Okinawans. Both appeared to be ancient. The lady was helped by her husband and had wounds in the chest showing some blood.

As she sat on the ground with her husband standing behind her the squad and I circled around them. They spoke no English but it was clear they were both terrified. He held her shoulders for comfort.

There was a short pause and then the lieutenant firmly announced, "Well we are moving up to the front in ten minutes, we don't have time to take prisoners. So someone has to shoot them both." What happened next was unbelievable. He looked around the group and noticed I was the only one with a side arm, my 45 Colt. He then ordered me to shoot both of these old people. I was totally shocked and told him I could not do this. There was dead silence, then God saved the day as I looked over the lieutenant's shoulder a six by six truck came over the rise heading to the rear.

I pleaded with the officer for permission to stop the truck and see if they could take the old couple back to the rear. He agreed and warned me, "You better run fast." I ran at world record speed and was able to stop the truck. Not only were they going back to the rear but with an empty truck but they had a stretcher.

As this beautiful old lady kneeled on the stretcher I handed her some C-Ration hard candy. My reward was a big smile.

The painting by my friend Don Prechtel brings back the memory. Even in the hell of war good things happens.

Wilbur E. Ternyik