

# Operation Blue Star

## And The

### Third Reconnaissance Battalion

### 1959-1960

By

James R. Hewitt Jr.



JAMES ROBERT HEWITT JR.  
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Five US Marines were swept out to sea during a major storm in a 14 foot rubber boat while attempting a simulated clandestine landing on White Beach off on the southwestern shore of Taiwan, two days before D-Day during Operation Blue Star on Tuesday, March 22, 1960 at 0230 Hours.

29 US ships from the Seventh Fleet, fixed wing aircraft of Patrol Squadron 40, US Bon Home Richard, First Marine Air Wing and Marine Helicopters from the USS Princeton plus 11 ships of the Nationalist Chinese Navy conducted a maximum effort air sea search covering 50,000 square miles in the Formosa Straits. Every known uninhabited rock and island was searched with out locating the Marines. The search had been covering the possibility that the men may have

sailed their boat to an island eastward rather than drifting to the Chinese Mainland in order to avoid capture by the Red Chinese.

On Friday March 25, 1960 at 0900 hours the fleet was notified by Nationalist Chinese Police that the Marines possibly were on Hung Tiou Hsui Island located approximately 45 miles east of Taiwan off its southeastern coast 125 miles from where they attempted their landing on Taiwan. The author was one of the five Marines. This is his story of their survival...



SSgt. L.S. Kelly      SSgt. A. Reyes      Cpl. L. R. Stark

I joined the Marine Corps Reserve on my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday in April 1957 with an eight year obligation and a six month active duty for training requirement. I elected to perform my six month active duty requirement beginning July 1, 1957. I completed a grueling 13 weeks of Boot Camp at MCRD San Diego, CA as a member of platoon 374 under the supervision of Senior Drill Instructor, Staff Sergeant L. S. Kelly. His junior DI's were Staff Sergeant A. Reyes and Corporal

L. R. Stark. I was the only "six month reservist" in the platoon.



Major J. O. LePrete presenting the Platoon Series Honorman, Blues Award to Michael J. Ferrell October 1957 MCRD San Diego, California

Sergeants Kelly and Reyes were WWII and Korean Veterans and Corporal Stark was a Korean War Veteran. They were all very demanding drill instructors and trained us well. Upon graduation from Boot Camp we found them to be decent guys and great Marines whom we all admired and looked up to.

Our right guide and Series Honor man was PFC Michael J. Farrell (He later became an actor and played B. J. Hunnycutt in the MASH TV Series).

Following boot it was 4 more weeks of Training at the Infantry Training Regiment (ITR) at Camp Pendleton, California. Upon completion of ITR all of my companions of the regular Marine Corps were reassigned to their regular duty stations or MOS training schools. I was transferred to the advanced weapons training Regiment to complete the remaining six weeks of my active duty training requirement and was returned to active reserve status on January 1, 1958. On March 31, 1958 I enlisted into the regular Marine Corps for an additional four years of active duty.

After all this Infantry and special weapons training I had completed, I was given a choice of three duty assignments. They were: Marine Barracks, Subic Bay, Philippines, Marine Barracks Adak, Alaska and Marine Barracks Bangor, Naval Ammunition Depot, Washington State. I chose Bangor, which was totally inconstant with my training in advanced weaponry.

It turned out that I had a medical profile, which limited me to light duty assignments and excluded me from assignments to any combat infantry or rifle unit because I was severally underweight. This was pretty much a guaranteed 4-year assignment with no prospect of going anywhere in the Marine Corps so long as I was able to avoid weight

gain. I think perhaps the best thing that came out of this duty assignment for me was when they took me to the Naval Air Station at nearby Whidbey Island and gave me a GED test for high school equivalency, which I passed. This helped me get into college later.

I knew nothing of this profile until I attempted to transfer to an Infantry weapons unit with the First Marine Division at Camp Pendleton. After nine months in the guard company, I was getting restless and wanted a more exciting assignment. I suspect that the fact that I could not be transferred had a reverse psychological effect on the First Sergeant as well. He could not transfer me if he wanted to and this made him want to very badly.

I approached the Medical Officer and protested my profile. He determined that if he could get the First Sergeant to coordinate with the Mess Sergeant a two-week special assignment in the mess hall with emphases placed on the consumption of great quantities of certain kinds of food (sort of a forced special diet you might say), so that I might gain enough weight to get the profile removed. Of course the First Sergeant jumped at the chance and I was feasting in the mess hall all day every day for the next two weeks. I pretty much had the run of the place. I could eat anything I wanted fixed any way I wanted it anytime I wanted it and, no guard duty.

In order to remove the profile I needed to weigh in at 130 pounds by the end of the two weeks. When we started I only weighed 118 pounds. So that meant I had to gain 12 pounds in 14 days. Every day at the same time the Mess Sergeant would put me on the scale but the weight gain was not improving fast enough. The First Sergeant came in every day and would ask the Mess Sergeant how I was doing and the Mess Sergeant would simply shrug his shoulders then the First Sergeant would just hang his head and shake it in a negative manner and walk off. Sometimes I thought there must be a big money bet in the works and the First Sergeant was about to lose his shirt. I feared that if that was the case and I could not get the profile lifted I would be at the mercy of the First Sergeant with a toothbrush and can of Bon-Ami in hand and on my knees cleaning grout in the floor tile for the duration of my enlistment. On the last day I was three pounds short and scheduled to report to the Medical Officer to check my weight at 1300 hours. Per the First Sergeant's orders, I spent the morning in the mess hall eating 3 pounds of bananas and forbidden to make any head calls before I weighed in and it worked.

They lifted my profile and I was transferred to the First Marines at Camp Pendleton, California. I was assigned to the weapons platoon of "K" (Kilo) Company, Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division (FMF) as a member of a M29A1 81-mm mortar team. My job was carrying the mortar base plate, which as I recall, weighed something like 60 or 80 pounds.

Carrying the mortar base plate in addition to my pack, rifle and all my other equipment while on amphibious maneuvers and trying to climb down a cargo net of an APA and getting into landing craft off the coast of Camp Pendleton was not a fun job. But I had no complaints; it felt good to be part of a team and to do what Marines do. It was not long

before I was back down to 118 pounds though. However, I was never checked again by medical for a profile and remained eligible for line outfits from then on. The following January, I received orders to the Camp Pendleton staging area for transportation to Okinawa.

After a run through the shot line at the clinic and re-qualification at the rifle range I found myself with all my gear in the back of a 6X6 truck as part of a very long convoy in route to Long Beach, California where we boarded an old WW II Liberty ship, the USS Talladega APA 208. We departed on February 2, 1959. The ship was one of six troop transport ships in a convoy en route to Okinawa. It was a miserable 31-day voyage stopping in route at Pearl Harbor for a day with one 8-hour liberty, which I was not privy to as I was assigned the duty for the day. Then it was on to the World War II island battleground of Iwo Jima for a touring cruise around the island just to kill time because the port at Okinawa was not ready to receive us. (We should have stayed at Pearl another day and I too could have had liberty)



Morning muster aboard the USS Talladega APA 208 en-route to Okinawa February 1959

We arrived at Naha, Okinawa on March 7, 1959 and like a bunch of cattle we were herded into the back of 6X6 trucks provided by Ninth Motors and on our way north where we were later deposited in front of a line of empty squad tents at Camp Hansen for processing. I was required to perform my annual obligation of 30 days of mess duty and was promptly assigned to the camp mess hall. (Should have gone to cooks and bakers school considering all the mess duty I had to pull.)

I recall my first night on the town. I went by myself and after visiting a number of bars I noticed that each time I entered a bar the girls in the place would hold out their arms and call out to me “Dozo, Dozo” followed by a few seemingly kind words I could not understand. It seemed that everywhere I went the girls were calling me Dozo and motioning for me to sit with them. I never sat with any of them because I could not understand what they were saying. When I had my fill of excitement for the evening I returned to my tent at Camp Hansen thinking I was someone special and told all the guys that I must look like some guy named Dozo. When asked why I thought that? I replied because all the girls were calling me Dozo. He must be an awfully popular guy, I said. Then someone who had been to Okinawa previously piped up and said, dozo in Japanese means “please” and they were simply saying, please come sit with me. My ego was immediately deflated and all the guys got a good laugh.

I completed my tour in the Camp Hanson mess hall by the first week of May and was assigned to MCB Camp Butler, Third Marine Division, Head Quarters and Service Battalion as a clerk in the Division Fiscal Office. I was given the mundane task of adding up the totals of purchase orders all day long with a ten key adding machine. The only excitement in this job was an occasional smile from an attractive young Okinawan woman who was working as an assistant to Captain Johnson. She would occasionally catch me alone and ask me to make purchases for her in the Marine Post Exchange (which was strictly forbidden) and I was only too happy to provide these luxuries for her on the sly. Even though most Marines in the infantry units would have been happy to trade places with me, I found the job boring and unrewarding. I went through a lot to get my profile removed and I was not about to spend the rest of my service carrier as a clerk punching the keys of an adding machine and buying goodies in the Post Exchange for Sumiko. I wanted to do something exciting.

Captain Johnson was a good officer to work with in the office setting. He didn't have a private office and his desk was next to my desk. It seemed he was just one of the guys and we were never intimidated by his rank. Every day on the job I complained that I was not meeting my potential as a Marine. I never missed an opportunity to express my desire to be reassigned to an infantry unit or a rifle company. I had heard of the new Reconnaissance Battalion at Camp Mercy and that they were some kind of elite Marine Special Operations Force who frequently deployed on missions as small independent reconnaissance teams attached to other 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division infantry units.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion (3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn.) was re-organized officially as a Marine Corps unit on Okinawa in 1958 at "Camp Isahama" or as it was commonly called "Camp Mercy" Which was an old World War II Army Hospital initially converted into a Marine Corps Camp to accommodate the housing needs of the Third Marine Regiment. The camp was located in the central part of Okinawa a short distance north of Kadena AFB. The battalion specialized in amphibious reconnaissance, ground reconnaissance, surveillance, and limited scale raids in support of other Marine Air-Ground units.



Charlie Company 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon team giving a demonstration to members of the First Marine Regiment. 1959

I never missed an opportunity to remark within earshot of Captain Johnson that I should be a "Recon Marine" instead of a "pogy bait clerk" (a slang Navy -Marine term of contempt for someone who has a cushy or easy going job). Well they say, "Be careful what you wish for". By July 1, 1959 I was in the back of Captain Johnson's jeep with my rifle and a fully packed sea bag heading south en route to Camp Mercy carrying orders to report to the commanding officer of "C" (Charlie) Company 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion.



Master Sergeant Chappell  
Charlie Company 3rd Recon Bn. 1959

The company office was an old run down Quonset hut with an old putrid green and white paint job. The paint was peeling off but there was a large freshly painted red and yellow shield mounted over the entrance featuring a white skull and crossed boat paddles (in place of crossed bones) superimposed over the points of a compass on the red background and the words “Swift, Silent and Deadly, Charlie Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn.” I was getting excited, this was a real Marine outfit, I thought.

As soon as I entered the duty office, the First Sergeant, Master Sgt Chappell, was on me and I found myself on the deck in front of his desk giving 25 pushups. I wasn’t being punished for a criminal act mind you, that was just the way it was in Recon. You never walked, it was always double time and if an officer or a staff NCO caught you walking he would order you down for 25 pushups. You were expected to be in tiptop physical condition at all times. It was immediately

apparent that I was going to be doing some pushups now and again.

By this time I was still a 19 year old runt of a kid and just received my second promotion from Private to PFC when I reported in at 5’11 ½” tall and weighing 118 pounds soaking wet with a 26 inch waist and sporting the nick name “Bones”. I could not wear my cartridge belt because when it was adjusted down to its smallest size it would just drop down to my ankles. So I had to use BAR-man’s suspenders during rifle inspections to hold my cartridge belt up. I never gained any weight in that unit but I was soon in top physical condition. If you were a field Marine and you were small and or underweight and assigned to a weapons or rifle company you could find yourself carrying equipment that weighed almost as much as you did. Recon was the ideal unit for a guy like me. Because of my weight, I could run like the wind and never got winded. We always traveled light and seldom carried anything too heavy or cumbersome. We didn’t even have to wear steel helmets and in the field we left our rifles in our lockers most of the time and carried M3-A1 sub-machineguns (grease guns) instead, which weighed less than 3 pounds.



First Squad, 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Recon Bn. 1959 resting after completing a hydrographic survey.  
Left to right: Pvt Karl Thompson, Pfc Morris (with out shirt), James Hewitt (in front of Morris) Unknown, Cpl Rameriz, Cpl. Bob O'Riely, unknown, Robert Westover, unknown and unknown.

We trained extensively at a swimming pool at the nearby Army Base at that housed their Special Forces. Our mode of transportation was on foot at double time of course. We would depart Camp Mercy right after morning chow and upon arrival at the pool we would swim until chow time and eat lunch at the Army base which I must admit was a lot better than the chow at Camp Mercy. Then after chow it was double time back to Camp Mercy just in time to get ready for rifle inspection in full uniform before evening chow. We also would frequent the local beaches to learn and practice hydrographic surveys (making maps of obstacles

and hazards under water) using snorkel gear, swim fins and facemasks.

We underwent cold weather survival training at the Mt. Fuji-McNair area of Japan for 15 days. In this instance we were also acting as aggressors in a war game with an infantry regiment and a tank battalion. (Can't remember which ones) anyway on our first night out on patrol our squad divided up into three patrols one fire team each. (4 man teams) and it was pitch black that night. I mean you could hardly see your hand in front of your face. I was the point on our patrol and on this training we were armed with our M1 Rifles loaded with blank rounds. We each loaded our rifles with clips of eight rounds. I remember that our platoon leader at that time was Lt. Robert C. Knowles and he was assigned as an umpire. All of a sudden I saw a silhouette of a man armed with an M1 standing directly in front of me and almost close enough to touch him. We saw each other at exactly the same time and both of us pointed our rifles at each other and fired all eight rounds. This created a chain reaction and the three other members of my fire team opened up and emptied their rifles as we heard three other guys opposite us open fire and empty their rifles at the same time. When all the smoke cleared it turned out the other group was one of the other fire teams from our squad. Lt Knowles declared all of us dead so two thirds of our squad were now dead from friendly fire and we were out of the game for the rest of the night.

The following night our whole platoon went out to raid the tankers. We located a tank



First Lieutenant Robert Knowles in camo's wearing hat with white band on it is the unpire during these war games on one of the tanks we captured.

platoon all of which were sleeping in mummy bags next to their tanks (it was a very cold night) and even their guard was asleep. This was about 0200 hours. We swooped in and zipped all of them up in their bags tied them shut so they could not unzip their bags and held them as POW's. One was a LT Colonel who was raising hell and wanted loose but we kept him zipped up in his mummy bag. He was so angry that we were afraid to let him out until someone of higher rank came by to protect us from his wrath. Soon our Colonel came by and felt sorry for him and ordered us to let him loose. Glad I never got transferred to that tanker outfit after that.

We frequently practiced escape and evasion techniques while living off the land in unfamiliar surroundings for days or weeks at a time with out provisions in the jungles of northern Okinawa and on the island of Irimote-Jima.

Once in the jungle of the extreme northern part of Okinawa we were split up into 5 man teams and given a map and compass and told we had five days to travel through the jungle on a 35 mile course with out any provisions and told we had to live off the land. Our mission was to make the trip with out getting captured. A battalion from the 5th Marine Regiment was in the field trying to capture us.

Gunny Sgt Heistler was in charge of our 5-man team and he was wise as a fox. We eat well off of snake, turtles, fish and stole pineapples from the area farmer's fields. The exercise was designed so that everyone would get captured. However, the evening of the last night of the exercise our team had not been captured yet. It was dusk and we had come to a ridge with steep rugged impassable areas descending on both sides of the dirt



First Squad 3rd Platoon Charlie Company 3rd Recon Bn. Seated in the jeep: Driver, LCpl Shockley, Front Passenger seat, PFC Sequioa, Right rear seat Pvt. Karl E. Thompson, Left rear seat, Pvt James R. Hewitt Jr. Standing in front PFC Narcisses Standing in rear, unknown, Pfc. Morris, Pvt. Meza and Pfc. Robert L. Westover



road with a large clear area where a large encampment of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were blocking our ability to get through.

As we sat some distance away contemplating how to get around them an old truck approached us with a load of wood and some Okinawan woodcutters on it. We stopped the truck, took off our shirts, covered our selves with lots of dirt, borrowed shirts and pointed straw hats the woodcutters were wearing, dressed like Okinawans; we climbed up on the load of logs and had them drive us right through the middle of the camp. While doing so we would wave at the Marines camped there and smile and laugh and they in turn would wave and smile back and through us candy and cigarettes from their rations.

By the time we got through them and out of sight it was dark and we got off the truck at a small area that was a turn out for passing vehicles. After the truck left we were setting their discussing our next move when we heard an approaching jeep so we spread out and covered our selves up with our ponchos so as to look like rocks along the road. The jeep came up and stopped. A 5th Marine Captain got out and walked up next to me. I remained as still as I could while he stood their and urinated. Then he got back in his jeep and they drove away.

The next morning we reached our objective and found out we were the only team from the entire company that was not captured. Every one was amazed and the same Captain who was in the jeep the night before came and interviewed us to find out how we were able to circumvent his trap. We told him about riding through the camp on the truck and he would not believe us. Then I told him that I was the rock he urinated on the night before, he was astonished but he believed us. Recon was hard work but a fun outfit and I always enjoyed our field actives.

We went to the Island of IRO MOTE JIMA (the last island in the Ryukyus chain before you come to Taiwan) for a week of survival training. We were on the USS Cook APD 130 as part of an experiment using radar for guidance. There is a large river that opens into the sea on the island and we were to be guided to the pre determined landing site up river by radar from the ship. Each of our boats were equipped with a devise similar to an umbrella except it was covered with aluminum foil and the ship's radar could track us as we traveled up the river and would tell us where to land by radio when they determined we had reached our destination. Our mission was two fold. One we were to live off the land for a week and two, we were to map the island to determine if it were useful as a training base for the third Marine Division. The Island was one of those islands that were by passed during WWII and we were the first American troops to land on the Island.

We paddled up river for nine miles and when we reached our landing site on the bank of the river there was a thatched roofed hut there with an old couple of the native population living there alone. They had a water buffalo and various chickens and ducks in the yard and a fishing canoe on the bank. They did not know who we were and did not understand why we were there. We just moved into their yard and set up camp and the next day they were gone. We maintained our base their while we went out on our various missions. I used the canoe for fishing and caught a few fish. Some guys killed a wild pig and we

caught several snakes for food. When we left we all pooled our money and left it in the hut for the old couple when they returned. I doubt that they knew what to do with it though.

By late December 1959, Charlie Company had performed numerous recon missions operating off submarines, destroyers and destroyer escorts paddling to shore in small rubber boats traveling to remote areas including Borneo and the Philippines at Corrigador Island off the tip of the Bataan Peninsula as you enter Manila Bay. We operated in small 5 and 9 man teams making stealth landings and performing simulated clandestine missions on various islands. It was the Marine Recon units that developed the battle cry "OORAH!" now used universally by both the Army and Marines. It stems from our departures from submarines. We used to get into our inflated rubber boats on the decks of submarines and let the submarine submerge out from under us as we paddled off on our mission. As the submarines were submerging the warning horn would sound off "AAH-OO-GAH, AAH-OO-GAH, AAH-OO-GAH" We would mock this sound and eventually it evolved into our battle cry "OORAH!"



3rd Platoon 3rd Recon Bn. getting ready to stand a rifle inspection, June 1959 at Camp Mercy Okinawa.



Sergeant Lamb of Able Company 3rd Recon Bn. (in white tee shirt) bidding farewell to Recon Marines going home shortly after we moved to Camp Swab, Okinawa. August 1959

Note the pull up bar in front of the entrance to the barracks. We were required to do pull ups each time we entered or departed the barracks.

While we were based at Camp Mercy they were building a new Marine Base on the northern part of the Island, which they named Camp Swab. I cannot remember the exact month but I believe it was in July or August of 1959 when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn. became the first unit to occupy the new base. We were there to greet the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment when they arrived there from Camp Pendleton, in late August. In fact I recall a few unpleasant skirmishes with the newly arrived 5<sup>th</sup> Marines over who would control the EM Club that we felt we owned. In fact the base MPs came to break up a

disturbance once and some of us Recon troops hopped into the OD's jeep and made a run for our barracks with the MPs on foot not far behind. But we managed to ditch them and dispose of the jeep. I wonder if my old Sergeants Jablonski and Creager are reading this if they are I know they are getting a chuckle out of this memory since they were in the jeep with me. I don't know who the OD was and thankful I never found out.

Around this time some of our strongest swimmers were selected for scuba training at the Third Marine Division Scuba School. At the end of December of "59" the best of those graduates were sent on to the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit Underwater swimmers school at West Lock, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. After a months training they rejoined our unit on Okinawa as an elite underwater recon team in February 1960.



Members of 3rd Recon Bn during training at the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit Underwater swimmers school at West Lock, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii January 1960 .

On August 23, 1958 The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) started a bombardment campaign of Qumoy and Matsu Islands in the Straits of Formosa from the mainland. Although these Islands are a very short distance from the Mainland and from the Mainland they are visible to the naked eye they are claimed territory of the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan. The Straits separate Taiwan and Mainland China by about 90 miles. The United States sent the Seventh Fleet and its Marines into the Straits on patrol between Matsu Island and the Mainland of China. Air Force and Army troops were sent to the main Island of Taiwan to help beef up their defenses. Since that time the PRC have continued the harassment of the Nationalist Chinese people on Taiwan and hostile acts by the mainland have continued to this day.

In 1960 President Eisenhower's administration determined that a show of force was in order to demonstrate to the PRC that the US and its allies stood ready to prevent a hostile takeover by the PRC, and were perfectly capable of defending the independence of the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan or the Republic of China (ROC). Commanders of the US 7th fleet, Third Marine Division, Fourth Marine Brigade from Hawaii and the Nationalist Chinese Navy, Air Force and Marines put together a multi national training exercise which was to be a mock invasion of Taiwan to repel an enemy force assumed to have invaded Taiwan. (Sort of a dress rehearsal you might say.) Elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Bn. Would play a major roll in this operation.

The First Marine Expeditionary Force made up of the Fourth Marine Brigade from Hawaii and commanded by Lt. General Thomas A. Wornham USMC was moved to Camp Mercy, Okinawa (formerly occupied by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion) in January 1960 for preparatory training as part of the defending force for the exercise, which was to take

place on the southwestern coast of Taiwan beginning around the ancient city of Tainan and extending down the coastline to the southern tip of Taiwan. The defense of Taiwan was to be a joint effort between the First Marine Expeditionary Force and ROC Marines commanded by ROC Marine Lt. Col. Shih Ke-hsin.

Although this was to be a training exercise, there were real obstacles to be encountered. The invasion area they were to occupy and defend was rugged mountainous terrain. On most of the landing beaches it was only about the length of a football field before you began the steep incline of the mountains. The area was infested with poisonous snakes and many Marines would complain about the stings of the centipedes in their footwear and sleeping bags. The temperatures had been exceeding 90 degrees for days and there were high winds carrying blinding clouds of dust.

In addition to this operation, Taiwan was on alert for Communist raiding parties, which have been plaguing them since the onset of the bombings. Specific boundaries were set in place for members of the War Games to operate with in and anyone out side those boundaries were subject to be shot on sight by the Taiwanese authorities if mistaken for communist raiders. We (the invasion force) were briefed on what our mission was to be and warned that Chinese Communist gun boats some disguised as fishing trawlers would in all likelihood be in the area observing our fleet operations. We were told that small clandestine communist military units could be on the main island of Taiwan to observe us in action. We were cautioned that we should avoid contact at all costs. Given that we were operating in the Straits, which only separate Taiwan from China by 90 miles, and relations between the US and PRC were non-existent, we were all well aware that very unpleasant long-term incarceration could result from such contact.

The invasion force was made up of The Third Marine Division reinforced by a ROC Marine Regiment, backed by 130 warships from the US 7th fleet and about 20 ROC warships supported by US Marine and ROC air units. Rear Admiral Charles O. Triebel, USN, and Brigadier General Louis B. Robertshaw, USMC commanded the invasion forces. The invasion troops numbered about 25,000 Americans and Chinese. The entire operation consisted of about 60,000 service men from both countries. This expeditionary force was considered to be the largest invasion force put together since the invasion of Okinawa in WW II. When this armada formed off the coast of Taiwan it stretched out for twelve miles. They called this exercise "Operation Blue Star".

The First Marine Expeditionary Force and their ROC Marine counterparts were in place and ready to defend the objective by March 18, 1960. According to the plan the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment was to land on Blue beach near the village of Hakou and the 2nd Battalion would land on White beach near Cheh Cheng. They were to take the high ground 6 to 10 miles into the rugged hills. The Chinese Marines of Regimental Landing Team 2 were to hit Green beach at Feng Chan 10 miles to the north of their US Marine counterparts with their objectives also 10 miles into the rugged hills. After these objectives were taken, the Marines at White beach were to push south to join forces with yet another Marine assault force, (1st Battalion 9th Marines) who were to test a new military tactic called "Vertical Envelopment" by being air lifted to Ken-ting and Hung

Chung at the extreme southern tip of Taiwan by Helicopters from the flight deck of the USS Princeton to secure this simulated deep-water port and cut it off from the enemy forces.

The 3rd Marine Division Construction engineers were assigned the task of landing behind the infantry and constructing a 4000-foot metal runway for jets, which was about 2000 feet shorter than normal. They were given 72 hours to accomplish this mission. Arresting gear for landings and jet assisted take-off apparatus were used to enable the jets to fly sorties from these fields.

It was about March 14, 1960 when we were assembled into briefing rooms and the plans for our missions during Operation Blue star were laid out. There were eight of our newly trained swimmers identified and divided into two 3-man teams and one 2-man team. The swimmers were Mike McDaniels, Paul Vibe, Jim Pinkinton, James Peterson, John Chambers, David Hare, Roy Carter and Jerry Armstrong.

Each of the three teams was assigned separate pre invasion missions along the southwestern coast of Taiwan. Team 1 was given Blue Beach at Hakou with the objective to swim ashore perform a beach recon, plot enemy defensive positions and move inland to establish an observation post and report air activities at the airfield south of Tainan. Team 2 was to swim ashore on White Beach at Cheh Cheng, establish an outpost, identify and report enemy emplacements and actives and report Height of the waves and the length of the surf. The third team was to swim ashore at the southern tip of Taiwan and make preparations in the Ken-ting and Hung Chung area to establish the landing zones for the helicopter assault force.

3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon Charlie Company (our platoon) was divided up into three Recon teams. There were two 9-man teams and one 5-man team. Each team was assigned their own inflatable rubber boat. One nine man team was lead by our platoon leader 1st Lt. Kenneth A. McNutt the other nine man team was lead by our platoon sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Heistler and the five man team was lead by Acting Sergeant Ernest G. Ross. I was on the five-man team. The other three-team mates were PFC Robert L. Westover, PFC Gerald R. Goodman and Private Karl E Thompson.



Charlie Company 3rd Recon Bn. securing their gear following a amphibious landing in their rubber boats and changing into swim gear to conduct a hydrographic survey.  
1959



James R. Hewitt Jr. USMC  
March 20, 1960  
Aboard USS H.J. Thomas DDR833.  
On a smoke break from mess duty.

We were given a pre invasion nighttime landing Mission in rubber boats on White Beach to reinforce the swim teams and continue to locate the enemy defenses, estimate their numbers identify obstacles and mines; then report back to the fleet with this information prior to the invasion. Following the invasion we were to join with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines and render them assistance in any reconnaissance missions they had need of.

On March 15, 1960 the three swim teams boarded the USS Cook APD 130 at White Beach Okinawa en-route to the Formosa Straits. They were accompanied by the Navy's first platoon of Underwater Demolition Team 11 Commanded by LTJG. T. Devine. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March our platoon followed suit and boarded the USS Herbert J. Thomas DDR 833 The two remaining platoons of Charlie company boarded the USS Edson DD 946 and USS Picking DD 685 and we all departed en-route to the Formosa Straits.

After boarding the ship and assigned our sleeping quarters, we were integrated with the ships crew and assigned to various duties on board our assigned ship. I was approached by Lt. McNutt and Sgt Heistler and advised that they were assigning me to work in the ships mess and I was instructed to pilfer as much non-perishable food items from the ships stores as I could with out being caught so we would not have to eat c-rations while in the field. I proceeded to befriend the Navy Second Class Petty Officer in charge of the mess. In addition to what I could steal, He provided me with such goodies as canned lunchmeat; canned ham canned Bacon, canned turkey, fresh potatoes, carrots onions etc. Each day I would bring the loot to the rest of the platoon and they would divide it up and hide it until it was time for us to disembark. Since I was the one who commandeered the food and there were only 5 of us in our boat to paddle, we were not required to carry it to shore. Subsequently the two nine man crews agreed to carry the stolen goodies on their boats.

On this particular mission they determined we needed some additional firepower and I was required to carry a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) complete with bi-pod, which weighed a little over 20 pounds not counting the additional weight of the ten 20-round magazines. One man on each of the other boats also carried BARs. Our boats were 18 ft long for the 9-man crews and 14 ft long for the one 5-man crew. They were inflatable boats made of nylon and rubber, which we had to inflate just prior to departure from the ship. Each boat was equipped with 5 or 9 paddles depending on the crew size, a hand pump for inflating the boat, a PRC 10 Radio with battery, mounted on a pack board and a pair of binoculars. We each had a small field pack with extra items of clothing, toiletries

and two days rations. We had our weapons, a K-Bar, a poncho and two canteens of water (2 pints). Each team leader had a magnetic compass and a map of the area we were landing at and our objective.

Meanwhile on board the Cook the swim teams had their own logistical problems to resolve. They were to swim ashore wearing only a facemask swimsuit, swim fins, web belt, K-Bar (Marine combat knife) and tennis shoes laced to their belt. They took tennis shoes to get over the coral that protected the beach. So once ashore they would need other provisions, equipment and dry clothes plus they had to have a radio and weapons. So they first placed the items they needed with them into what we called "Willie Peter bags" nick name for Waterproof or WP Bag. Then they placed the gear into large AGR/9 radio cans along with some weight to neutralize the buoyancy of the cans when in the water. In other words the cans would not rise to the top nor would they sink to the bottom and were easily pulled along as they swam to shore. They could not carry grease guns with fully loaded magazines so instead they placed 45 cal. Pistols into their WP Bags.

On Saturday, March 19, 1960 a moonless night with slight cloud cover it was pitch black out side and about 2200 hours when the USS Cook arrived about two miles from the shore of the southern coast of Taiwan. The ship was not burning its running lights and was in total black out conditions traveling parallel to the coastline from south to north. The ship stopped briefly at the southern tip of the Island as swim team number three silently slipped into the water with all their gear and headed for shore on their mission. Getting back under way the ship continued north to White beach at Cheh Cheng remaining about two miles off shore and once again it came to a complete stop as Jerry Armstrong and David Hare, swim team number 2 slipped into the water with all their gear and headed for shore. Underway once again the Cook headed for its final drop off point at Blue beach near Hakou here the last team of three swimmers were dropped off and the ship departed the area with out any knowledge that a strong north to south current along the shore line would create an immense obstacle for the swimmers to over come.

Each of the swim teams were given Safe Conduct passes in case they ran into any trouble due to the high state of alert on Taiwan because of the communists raids and they were assigned a one hundred wide stench on the beach within which they were cleared for entry into the country. Anyone outside the boundary was considered the real enemy and fair game to shoot on site. Swim team number three at the southern tip were almost swept beyond the southern tip of the island and barely made land. Swim team number 1 at Blue beach was also swept many miles south of their designated boundaries and they had to adapt and get back to their assigned areas to complete their mission. The main landing forces recovered both these teams on D Day.

At White Beach Jerry Armstrong and David Hare were guided by an infrared light on shore. However, they could not make their designated landing area by swimming against the current towards the light and finally they decided to break south and get to shore any way they could. They landed three miles south of their landing area at about 0300 on the 20<sup>th</sup> after about 5 hours in the water. The landing area was a coral cliff about 20 feet high which they had to climb. They were both cut up pretty badly in the legs arms and hands

but they made it to a secure hiding place. They stowed their AGR/9 boxes and spent the first day ashore in their hiding place until about 2000 hours on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Then during the night they moved to a new location where they were close to the beach and could still observe the airfield.

On Monday March 21, 1960 the USS H. J. Thomas joined with the cruisers USS Eldorado, USS St Paul, USS Helena and destroyers USS Picking and USS Edson to form a squadron of American naval ships joined by ROC war ships off the southern coast of Taiwan. As the gun turrets all began to turn pointing towards the shore, I had just completed clean up from the mourning mess and was released to go topside and watch the show. There were targets along the shoreline and up into the hills each marked with a large white X. Some of the targets included a few small shacks. This was about to become an exciting demonstration of the firepower of the Seventh Fleet reinforced by the ROC Navy. This was to be the only part of Operation Blue Star where live rounds would actually be used.



DDR 833 Herbert J. Thomas

Note upper deck adjacent to the forward guns where I was seated during the broadside firing of the 5 inches

We were cruising about two miles off the shoreline. I settled in on an elevated structure that was just about 5 feet from the muzzle of the forward 5-inch guns when turned towards the broadside targets. As I sat there some sailors yelled at me to move away from there and I just ignored them thinking they wanted my seat. After the first shot I knew what they were trying to tell me. The blast almost knocked me down to the next deck and I felt like I was sun burned from head to toe. I moved in a hurry. I could not hear much for a long time after that. In fact I suffered a permanent partial hearing loss in my left ear and tinnitus still lingers to this day. They began bombarding targets on shore as various Marine and Chinese Air units joined in. It was a spectacular display.

Armstrong and Hare had remained in their position until dark on the 21<sup>st</sup>. after dark at about 2000 hours they made their way down to the beach getting there around 2100 hours. At this point it was raining hard and the winds were picking up pretty bad. They made their observations on the wave height and length and radioed in their report around 2300 hours and recommended that the landings be postponed for at least 24 hours due to the high seas and poor landing conditions. As they were returning to their OP they stumbled upon a Taiwan security patrol that took them into administrative custody until their credentials could be confirmed. They never recovered their AGR/9 boxes. They



were taken to a large staging area of aggressors and a Marine General came in and cancelled their mission and they were later returned to the landing forces.

Mean time on board the H. J Thomas our platoon was busy the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> making ready for our scheduled 0100 landing at White Beach on the morning of the 22nd. Our ship was approaching the coastline in full blackout conditions. We were inflating the boats and loading our gear in the boats and receiving last minute instructions and painting each other's face with camouflage paint. The seas were rough and the swells were about 18 feet high it was raining hard. We were all wearing our ponchos and it was freezing cold. The wind was blowing in the range of 40 to 50 mph in a northwesterly direction. As we approached our area of operation the bow of the ship was rising high into the air then dropping suddenly as we crossed over the swells. We finally arrived at our debarkation point and the ship maneuvered into position so that when the ship came to a stop it was parallel to the swells keeping the bow steady as we disembarked.

We were about 1000 yards from shore and it was about a 0100 hours when the ships Executive Officer conferred with our platoon leader Lt. Mc Nutt and advised him that our swim teams were recommending a 24 hour postponement of the mission due to the high seas. Lt. McNutt advised the Executive Officer that we were "Marines" and that we could accomplish the mission as we were well trained in this sort of operation. After much debate the Captain finally agreed to allow us to proceed with the mission. We finished loading our boats and proceeded to disembark. As we lowered our boats into the water the ship would rise and drop with the swells. The seas would drop from deck level to about 18 feet below deck then rise back up to deck level and back down again. So when we jumped into the boats we would wait until the boats would start back up towards the deck and jump and meet the boat as it came up to deck level. This maneuver was very dangerous and particularly difficult for me since my weapon was a heavy BAR and I was carrying twelve 20 round magazines to boot.



Nine man team from 3rd Platoon Charlie Company  
3rd Recon Bn.

Gunnery Sgt. Heisler's crew was the first boat to depart, then Lt. McNutt's boat, and we left last. By the time we got into the water, the other two boats had disappeared into the darkness of the moonless night. As soon as we pushed away, the destroyer departed back out to sea (with all its lights out) to re-join the fleet, never to be seen by us again.

We began paddling as hard as we could towards the same light that the Jerry Armstrong and Dave Hare had used to guide them when they swam ashore.

Sgt Heisler's nine-man crew made it to shore successfully and once it was apparent to them what the rest of us were not going to make it to shore they went on to complete the mission without us. The rest of us in the remaining two boats were not able to make land. The winds and the currents were more than we could overcome. At 1710 Hours on the 22<sup>nd</sup> a Japanese fishing boat called the Kotoshiro Maru, 16 miles from the southern tip of Taiwan picked up Lt. McNutt and his crew. About sixty miles from our original debarkation point at Cheh Cheng. They were transferred to the USS Pope County, a 7th fleet LST, and were returned to our unit at White Beach.

As we paddled our boat the weather continued to get worse and the seas got to be up to about 25 feet high and coming at us from two different angles. We paddled without stopping until well after sun up knowing full well that if we were not able to get to shore we would be in serious danger.

While all this was going on, The USS Cook was back in the area with the Navy UDT-11 team led by LTJG. Devine and elements of UDT-12. They had placed about 15 pairs of swimmers in the water off white beach conducting an unannounced swimmer attack on the anchored amphibious invasion fleet.

After daylight we were not able to see any land. The swells were picking up to about 30 ft feet and it was a constant battle just to keep the boat from capsizing. We had to fight the waves continuously by turning the bow of the boat into each wave before it hit to prevent the wave from capsizing the boat. As each swell passed it would turn us sideways and we would have to quickly turn the bow of the boat into the next swell. Sgt Ross was at the back of the boat using his paddle as a tiller to steer the boat and the rest of us just paddled desperately. I was able to make radio contact with someone very early just after dawn and could barely hear him and I advised him we were lost at sea and our location was unknown. The radio soon became incapacitated from the water damage and that was the last radio contact we had.

By now D-day had been postponed and 27 of the invading ships were dispatched to search for us. This was near disaster for the UDT men who were under these ships by now making their attacks. Not knowing there were men in the water several ships got under way looking for us resulting in some near misses and causing some long walks home. One pair of swimmers was about 20 feet from the screws of the USS Tulare an AKA doing a stern attack, when she got underway, the prop wash sent the pair tumbling. They along with others got swept south by the strong current and barely landed on the point to the extreme south of the landing beaches. Carrying all their diving gear they had to walk back about twenty miles to white beach for pick up. LT JG. Devine was making an attack on the Cruiser USS Eldorado ADC-11 and was hanging off the gangway ladder when she started to weigh anchor. Fortunately he was able to reach his pick up boat for return to the Cook.

At mid-day a swell crashed into our boat and washed Sgt. Ross out into the sea. Our PRC 10 radio had a long coiled cord attached to the handset. I would say that when it was stretched out, it was about 20 feet long. Any way, when Ross was washed out of the boat

the radio hand set got tangled around his ankle and we were able to pull him back in. By mid afternoon we were totally exhausted but had to keep going to keep the boat from capsizing.

We all realized that we needed more than what we had to get through this and we began to pray together. As I recall we were able to recite the Lords prayer and 23rd psalm as best we could remember. God answers prayer. By nightfall the sea had calmed down enough that we no longer needed to paddle and could rest. We set up a 2-hour night watch schedule so someone could watch for passing ships and the rest of us could get some sleep. We inflated our May West life vests, which wrapped around our necks and kept our heads afloat in the water filled boat so we would not drown in our sleep and we settled in for the night.

As day light appeared the next day, the 23rd, we tried to clean the grease paint from our faces with sea water and all it did was run into our eyes, burn and blur our vision. We were soaking wet and very cold. We began to assess our situation, inventory our gear and plan for our survival. We each had two canteens of fresh water, and we thought that it would last us about 30 days if we rationed it. Unfortunately the cork seals in the canteen caps leaked and our water was soon contaminated with seawater. We had two days of c-rations each. (The goodies I pilfered from the ships mess was on the other nine man boats). By rationing the c-rations we had about 35 days of food, or maybe more. We decided since we each had six meals that we could split one meal per day, five ways, which would make our rations last 35 days. We fashioned the top of a c- ration can into a makeshift mirror in hopes of flashing a ship but the skies were overcast and it did not work too well. One of us had a "Scripto" cigarette lighter that had a fishhook inside the transparent fluid reservoir so we tried to rig up a crude fishing line but we were unsuccessful. The hook was a small fishing fly and we could not make a line to fit it. We arranged our gear to make it more compact and discarded a few items in the boat that were of no use to our survival to make room for a long stay in the boat. This included dumping my Browning automatic rifle. About all it was good for was an anchor but we had no rope to attaché it to any way. Unfortunately there was no signaling device or flairs on board, only the disabled radio. But we had hopes it would dry out and become operational again soon.

We were not the only ones suffering grave danger this day in Taiwan. Unknown to us at the time, eighteen Taiwanese school children were trying to get to school that morning and were on board a ferry crossing the Cjiukang River about 40 miles south of Taipei when the ferry capsized from the high winds and rough waters. A middle aged woman and all 18 of the children drowned. I often wonder why God spared us instead of those little children.

My parents received the following Telegram dated March 23, 1960:

“23 MARCH 1960  
HEWITT, JAMES R. JR. XXXXXXXX  
CMC

MR. AND MRS. JAMES R. HEWITT SR.  
GENERAL DELIVERY  
LAKE ISABELLA, CALIF.

I DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOU'RE SON PRIVATE JAMES R. HEWITT JR. USMC IS MISSING. HE WAS EMBARKED ON A RUBBER RAFT ENGAGED IN MANEUVERS OFF TAIPEI FORMOSA 23 MARCH 1960. SEARCH AND AIR RECOVERY OPERATIONS ARE IN PROGRESS. EVERY EFFORT IS BEING MADE TO LOCATE HIM. YOU WILL BE KEPT ADVISED AS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS RECEIVED. I EXTEND TO YOU ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHY DURING THIS PERIOD OF ANXIETY.

DAVID M. SHOUP  
GENERAL USMC  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS"

At midmorning we saw the air craft carrier USS Bon Homme Richard CV 31, and it passed us by so close that we could see the sailors on deck and hear them talking. We tried every thing we could to get their attention. The c-ration mirror did no good because of overcast skies. We tied our white tee shirts to our paddles and waved them as the ship passed by, but the seas were still a little rough and they didn't see us. Soon the ship disappeared over the horizon. We began to sing songs we all knew from childhood and told tales to each other to keep occupied. A few religious songs came into the mix as we recalled some of our Sunday school days as kids.

Later that afternoon, a school of large fish (in retrospect we think Porpoises) began hitting our boat. Man was that a scary deal. Some of these fish were longer than our boat. After we got used to them we started dropping chewed gum and stuff in the water to see if they would try to eat it. We kind of played with them for a while. They carried on like this all the rest of the evening and on into the night. As night came the seas began to calm. We set up our watches, and settled in for the night. Karl Thompson had the last watch for the night.



On the dawn of the 24th, We were all huddled together in the bottom of the boat sound asleep as we got some comfort from what little body heat we could generate while still soaked to the bone when Karl's shouts, "LAND! LAND!" awakened us all. As we looked up, sure enough, there was land. As the sun was just barely showing on

the eastern horizon, we could see the faint outline of a large mountain on the distant

northwestern horizon. We also noticed that the sea was totally calm, smooth as a sheet of glass. We all knew that this might be our last chance at survival and although we did not know where we were we were sure we could reach this land in spite of the distance.

We studied the landscape and we knew from sea level that the horizon was about 18 miles away. The shoreline and base of the mountain was not visible and beyond the horizon, so we knew that the shore was beyond 18 miles, probably more in the neighborhood of 30 miles. We tried to determine how far we had drifted based on what we thought the speed of the current was. We came up with a guess that we traveled about 107 miles so far. Even though we had a compass, up until now there were no identifiable reference points and our map was only of the area we were supposed to have landed at so we had no idea which direction we had drifted. Based on what we did know, we concluded that there was a good chance that the land we could see was under the control of Communist Mainland China, or possibly part of the mainland south of China because we started out 90 miles east of China and on the western side of Taiwan. So the only land west of where we started was China. We were convinced that if this was the case and the communists apprehended us, we could be placed in a prison camp for a long period, even years while our governments sorted it all out, and got us free. After much debate, we concluded that we would risk incarceration as opposed to possible death at sea.

So we shared a meal got things organized in the boat and prepared our selves for a hard days work paddling towards the land. It was just after dawn when we began paddling towards the land mass. Sgt Ross was at the stern using his paddle as a rudder and he counted cadence at a reasonable steady pace as we paddled in unison to his cadence. (I guess you could say we had a 14 foot four person powerboat.) It took hours of paddling just to get close enough to see the shoreline.

As we began to approach the shore we could see people in the rocks and on the shore through our binoculars. They appeared to be wearing brown clothing and carrying weapons which tended to confirm our worst fears. These had to be Chinese Reds. We continued to paddle in to shore and we landed about 1400 hours (about 9 hours of hard paddling). As we got closer to shore, we realized that these people were dark brown skinned Aborigines wearing loin clothes and spear fishing. We had mistaken their dark skin for military uniforms and their fishing spears for military weapons.

As we paddled to shore we dragged our boat up on the very rocky beach, and set up a perimeter with our weapons drawn, not knowing whether we were on mainland China, or not. We began sorting out our gear and equipment and getting organized. The fishing Aborigines acted very friendly, and began to gather around us out of curiosity but remained standoffish. There was a language barrier that was difficult to over come. From our time stationed on Okinawa we all had developed a token Japanese, vocabulary. They seemed to understand some of our attempts to communicate using our limited knowledge of Japanese, but our communication was not very effective. These people were using a tongue we had never heard before. I think they knew somehow we were American because one of them left the area and came back some while later with a Chinese gentleman wearing a pith helmet and dressed in kakis. At first we thought he was some

kind of local official or policeman. He spoke perfect English and welcomed us to Hung Tou Hsui Island and informed us that he was a geologist working out of Taipei. He informed us that he had graduated from a California State University and that we were safe on an island possession of Taiwan.

I cannot remember the gentleman's name now but he was very helpful and not telling what would have happened if he had not been there to assist us.

Hung Tou Hsui lies about 40 miles off southeastern coast of Taiwan and is the last of a string of islands coming up from the Philippine Islands. When we drifted south along the western coast of Taiwan we drifted from the straights into the South China Sea and were picked up by a northern current from the Philippine Sea and started drifting in a northeasterly direction until we were back in the Pacific south east of HUNG TOU HSUI, which was a total distance of about 125 miles. Had we missed the Island we would have drifted out into the Pacific in a northeasterly direction and away from any other landmass for many miles.

We were told by our new found friend that two miles to the south of where we landed was one of three main villages on the island and that there was a Taiwan military liaison officer living there that may be able to assist us in contacting our Military officials. Sergeant Ross instructed us to remain with our boat and equipment while he accompanied the geologist to the village to confer with the military officer.



Yami Canoe

Some time had passed after Sgt Ross left for the village and a large primitive canoe with many oarsmen appeared off the coast coming from the south. Upon arrival through signs, they indicated that they wanted to tow us to their village. Thinking that they were sent by Ross to get us, we loaded our boat and tied it to their canoe. They proceeded to tow us to their village. On the way to the village we saw Sgt Ross heading back to where we had landed, and we soon found out that he had not

sent

these people to tow us and that it was simply their idea. Needless to say, Ross was very upset and didn't mind yelling at us from shore that we were in big trouble for not waiting for him. He soon got over it.

When we approached the village in tow behind the large canoe, there were young women many of whom displayed red stained teeth from chewing beetle nut dancing and a



Young Yami women dancing on the beach



Yami aborigine working on his house in the village

group of school-aged children formed two lines from the beach to the entrance to the village. I noticed that some of them were wearing western clothes and one had an American Cub Scout uniform shirt on that still had all the patches on it. I knew then, that they were in some fashion, being supplied with some type of American aid. They were all excited and seemed happy to welcome us to their village. As we walked up the beach between the two lines of children, the little schoolteacher led them in singing "God Bless America" in Chinese.

Our new friend told us that they learned this from the American missionaries that come every week by boat, to conduct church services. The clothing they were wearing was from care packages the missionaries brought them.

The aborigines on this island are Yamis people and of a Polynesian race. They were very primitive people and the men wore only loincloths and sometimes a sleeveless and button less vest they are a modest and humble people who live on a diet of fish, taro root and sweet potatoes. Their favorite fish is the flying fish, which is abundant there occasionally they will slaughter a pig for a special celebration. Their homes are built mostly below ground in a special fashion with their roofs positioned against the prevailing winds to protect them from Typhoons. Many of them had red stained teeth from chewing an addictive leaf called "Beetle Nut".

Sgt Ross had conferred with the army liaison officer in the village, who agreed to take us to the military outpost on the other side of the island. He formed a group of Yamis and they put our gear on long poles. With one litter Bearer on each end of the poles, they carried our gear for us leaving our boat at the village. The island rose straight up out of the sea and consisted of one steep mountain. We had to climb up one side and down the other to get to the outpost. The mountain was so steep that the trail was zigzagged up one side and down the other. We traveled the rest of the day and way into the night before we arrived at a larger village, on the islands opposite shore, which was located next to a compound of western style buildings situated within a large chain link fenced compound.

When we arrived we were escorted into a large community type structure that was covered with a thatched roof. Inside there were large kettle like containers of water heated by red hot rocks from a nearby fire. The village women bathed us in the huge containers and dressed us each in a clean set of white pajamas to wear. Afterwards we were escorted into the fenced compound and taken to what appeared to be the administrative building.



Standing: A ROC Marine Colonel and Captain W.A.Watson Our CO  
 Kneeling: PFC Gerald R. Goodman, Acting Sergeant Ernest G. Ross, PVT James R. Hewitt Jr., Pvt Karl E Thompson and PFC Robert L. Westover at Kaohsiung, Taiwan March 25, 1960

We were taken into a ROC Colonel's office and seated around a large table with the Colonel seated at the head of the table. A large meal featuring fried eggs as the main course was prepared for us. The English Speaking Geologist remained with us and interpreted for us as we explained our circumstances to the Colonel. After we ate, the Colonel advised us that we had two choices. Wait about a month until the next supply ship came in and go back to Taiwan on it, or he could radio his headquarters in Taipei and ask them to notify the Americans where we were. We tried to talk Sgt Ross into waiting for the supply ship so we could have a little vacation. However, Ross was married and did not want his wife to have to worry any longer than necessary, so we chose the latter. It would not have worked anyway

because a bulletin was about to come out about our being missing and he would have had to respond to it anyway. The Colonel took a liking to my "K-Bar", and asked what I wanted in trade for it. It was an offer I could not refuse he had several large Chinese magazines on a nearby desk that intrigued me so I asked for the magazines in trade. The Colonel removed some of his officers from their quarters and bedded us down in their place. (We learned later that he thought we were Marine Officers from a downed American aircraft). The following day the following message was issued by the US Military:

“25 MARCH 1960  
 FM COMDFSFLOT ONE  
 TO FLEACTS RYUKYUS  
 COMTAIWANDEVCOM/US  
 COMNAVFOR JAPAN  
 COMNAVPHIL  
 INFO CGFMFPAC



CG FIRST MAW  
CGTHIRD MARDIV  
CTF 74  
CTF 71  
COM SEVENTHFLT  
CHINFO  
BT

BLUE STAR CIB FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE X TWENTY SEVEN SHIPS OF THE SEVENTHFLT WITH THE FIXED WING AIRCRAFT OF PATROL SQUADRON 40, USS BON HOME RICHARD, FIRST MARINE AIR WING AND MARINE HELICOPTERS FROM THE USS PRINCETON ARE PRESENTLY SEARCHING FOR FIVE MEN IN A RUBBER BOAT WHICH WAS LAUNCHED FROM A DESTROYER EARLY 22 MARCH NEAR THE COAST OF SOUTHERN TAIWAN X IT HAS BEEN ASSUMED THAT THESE MEN WERE SWEEPED TO SEA BY WIND AND CURRENTS SINCE NINE OTHERS IN A SIMILAR BOAT WERE RECOVERED BY A JAPANESE FISHING BOAT JUST PRIOR TO SUNSET 22 MARCH X THESE MEN WERE ALL ATTACHED TO C COMPANY 3<sup>RD</sup> RECONNAISSANCE BATTALION AND WERE LAUNCHED TO CONDUCT SIMULATED CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS ASHORE DURING THE AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISE BLUE STAR X LIEUTENANT KENNETH MCNUTT USMC THE PLATOON COMMANDER IS ONE OF THE NINE MARINES RECOVERED BY THE JAPANESE FISHING BOAT STATED THAT THE BOAT CONTAINED SUFFICIENT FOOD AND WATER TO SUSTAIN THESE MEN FOR CONSIDERABLE PERIOD OF TIME X THE BOAT WAS EQUIPPED WITH A HAND PUMP FOR INFLATING THE BOAT, A RADIO, SIX PADDLES, AND EACH OF THE MARINES HAD WITH THEM TWO FULL CANTEENS OF WATER, TWO FULL DAYS RATIONS, A KNIFE, FIRST AID KIT AN INFLATABLE LIFE PRESERVER, EXTRA CLOTHING AND A PONCHO THE TEAM COMMANDER CARRIED A MAGNETIC COMPASS AND A MAP OF SOUTHERN TAIWAN X PROVIDING THAT THESE MEN REACHED SHORE ON 22 MARCH THEY WERE EQUIPPED TO OPERATE IN THE AREA WITH OUT SUPPORT FOR AT LEAST TWO DAYS AT WHICH THEY WERE TO JOIN UP WITH THE 3<sup>RD</sup> MARINE DIVISION WHICH STORMED THE BEACHES ON D-DAY OF THE AMPHIBIOUS TASK FORCE X THE METHODICAL SEARCH IS CONTINUING VIGOROUSLY X THE SHIPS AND AIR CRAFT ARE LISTENING CONTINUOUSLY ON THE FREQUENCY THAT THE RADIO HELD BY THE MARINES WILL TRANSMIT X THE SEA IS CALM AND THE WIND IS LIGHT IN THE AREA X THIS INCREASES THE CHANCES OF SIGHTING AND RECOVERING THESE MEN IF THEY ARE ADRIFT AT SEA.”

On the morning of the 25th, we were out in the compound of the outpost when we saw a squadron of single engine US Navy search planes flying in a search pattern along the beach to the south. A Navy PBY flew over. We ran into the barracks and grabbed some bed sheets and began to spell out Marines on the ground and the PBY dived down at us, and then flew off rocking his wings as he flew away. About 15 minutes later a

US Marine helicopter from the USS Princeton landed and the pilot, a Marine captain got out and gave us all a big hug and said, "get aboard the commandant is looking for you guys."

When we returned to Taiwan we were interviewed by Lt. General Lucky, commanding general of the Third Marine Division, who stated that he knew all along that his well-trained Marines would make it. I apologized for throwing out my BAR, and he told me that I did the right thing and he was just glad to have us back.

"25 MARCH 1960  
P250420Z  
FMCOMDESFL0T ONE  
COMTAIWANDEFCON/US  
COMNAVFORJAPAN  
COMNAVPHIL  
INFO CGFMFPAC  
CG FIRSTMAW  
CGTHIRD MARDIV  
CTF 74  
CTF17  
COMSEVENTHFLT  
CINCPACFLT  
CHINFO  
BT

BLUE STAR FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE X FIVE MISSING MARINES FOUND ON HUNG TOU HSUI ISLAND FORTY MILES EAST OF SOUTHERN TAIWAN X REPORTED IN GOOD SHAPE X DETAILS TO FOLLOW WHEN KNOWN X NAMES SUBJECT TO VERIFICATION ARE ERNEST G. ROSS ASGT, GERALD R. GOODMAN PFC, ROBERT L. WESTOVER PFC, CARL E THOMPSON PVT, JAMES R. HEWITT PVT. THE THIRTY ODD US AND CHINESE SHIPS AND THE NUMEROUS NAVAL AIRCRAFT CONDUCTED A SEARCH COVERING FIFTY THOUSAND SQUARE MILES AND MANY UNINHABITED ROCKS AND ISLANDS BEFORE SUCCESS X SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT NOW RESUME THEIR OPERATIONS IN EXERCISE BLUE STAR AND NORMAL FAR EAST EMPLOYMENT.

BT  
DIST 007 COG"

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"P R I O R I T Y  
25 MAR 60  
P250716Z  
FM COMDESFL0T ONE  
TO FLTACTS RYUKYUS  
COMTAIWANDEFCON/US

COMNAVFOR JAPAN  
COMNAVPHIL

INFO CG FMFPAC  
CGFIRSTMAW  
CG THIRD MARDIV  
CTF 74 CTF71 COMSEVENTHFLT  
CINCPACFLT  
CHINFO  
NAVY GRNC  
BT

CIB BLUE STAR FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE X MY 250420Z X NAMES  
CONFIRMED X AT 0900 THIS MORNING HELOS OF MARINE AIR GROUP  
SIXTEEN CHECKED OUT REPORT FROM CHINESE POLICE THAT MEN MIGHT  
BE ON HUNG TIOU HSUI X THEY WERE X SEARCH HAD BEEN COVERING  
POSSIBILITY THAT MEN MIGHT HAVE SAILED RAFT TO AN ISLAND TO  
EASTWARD RATHER THAN DRIFT TOWARDS ASIAN MAINLAND X WHEN  
THE SEARCH ENDED 29 US SHIPS, ELEVEN CHINESE, PLUS PLANES FROM  
CARRIER BON HOMME RICHARD FROM GUAM AND FROM FIRST MARINE  
AIR WING PLUS HELOS FROM CARRIER PRINCETON WERE ENGAGED IN  
ALL OUT SEARCH X MAX SEA AIR RESCUE EFFORT ALWAYS MADE WHEN  
POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT OUR MEN MAY BE SAVED

BT  
DISTRICT 007 COG”

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“24 MARCH 1960  
MR. AND MRS. JAMES R. HEWITT SR  
GENERAL DELIVERY  
LAKE ISABELLA, CALIF.

THIS MESSAGE CONFIRMS THE TELEPHONE CONVERSATION OF 24 MARCH  
1960. I AM PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON IS SAFE AND IN  
GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION. IT IS PRESUMED HE WILL CORRESPOND  
WITH YOU IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

DAVID M. SHOUP  
GENERAL USMC  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS”

When we returned to our unit on Taiwan our buddies were glad to see us. When I  
informed the others how fortunate I was to have lost my BAR, and not have to lug it  
around any more, a Barman from one of the other boats promptly produced a BAR and  
showed me the serial number. Much to my dismay, it was my BAR. This grateful Marine

pointed out that I had taken his by mistake in the dark. So I had to lug that thing around for the rest of the mission. We asked if there was any more of the good chow that I had so skillfully commandeered from the ships mess and they said " we didn't think you guys would make it, so we ate it all", with big smiles on their faces.

On March 29, 1960 Operation Blue star concluded and our unit proceeded to Blue Beach at Hakou and boarded the USS Talladega APA 208 and departed Taiwan arriving at Orawan Bay, Okinawa on March 31, 1960.

James Robert Hewitt Jr.

E Mail: [jrhewitt@charter.net](mailto:jrhewitt@charter.net)

Sources:

My Personal Knowledge and experience.

Statement from David Hare Gunnery Sergeant USMC Retired

Statement from Jerry Armstrong Sergeant USMC

Statement from Lieutenant Junior Grade Tad Devine USN

Pacific Stars and Stripes Vol. 16 No 80 Monday March 21, 1960, article titled "U.S. Chinese Marines Await Blue Star H-Hour" by Jim Shaw and article titled "Armada Poised for Landing by Junius Griffin.

Pacific Stars and Stripes Vol. 16 No 81 Tuesday March 22, 1960, article titled "President Chang to See Marines Storm Taiwan" by Junius Griffin

Pacific Stars and Stripes Vol. 16 No 82 Wednesday March 23, 1960, article titled "Bad Guys Can't Win in Operation Blue Star" by Jim Shaw and article titled "Fishing Boat Rescues 9 Marines off Taiwan"

Pacific Stars and Stripes Vol. 16 No 83 Thursday March 24, 1960, article titled " 25,000 Marines Hit Beach" and article titled "Marines Rescued At Sea Returned to Duty with Unit"

Pacific Stars and Strips Vol. 16 No 84 Friday March 25, 1960 article titled "7th Fleet Seeks 5 Missing At Sea" by Jim Shaw and article titled "Helicopter-Born Marines Add Muscle to Blue Star"

Pacific Stars and Stripes Vol. 16 No 85 Saturday March 26, 1960 article titled "Missing Marines Rescued from Island"

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Pacific Stars and Stripes Vol. 16 No 19 Wednesday March 30, 1960 article titled "Rescued Marines on Taiwan"

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Los Angeles Times March 30, 1960 article titled "Copter Rescues Five Marines"

The Military Personnel Records of PFC James R Hewitt Jr. USMC 1957-1962