

96th Div Memorial Remarks - July 27, 2002, 11:00 am

96th Division Veterans, their families, and friends, I am deeply honored to be asked to say a few words here at your reunion. I am honored because I do not have the noteworthy credentials of being a 96th Division veteran of the hot war in the Pacific. Instead, I am a 1st Division US Army veteran of the Cold War in Germany. During the Cold War in 1950 the Soviet Army would rush up to the border of the American Zone in Germany and stop - thankfully. Meanwhile our maneuvers were simulated battles in which the Aggressor, usually the US Constabulary, would come charging down the Fulda Gap. On one such maneuver my platoon of five tanks of the 18th Infantry Regiment, without any infantry support, was placed astride the Fulda road with the assignment to slow down the aggressor's attack. When the umpires viewed my situation they simply waved the Aggressors through and I spent the rest of that military exercise as a prisoner. That was pretty tame stuff compared with the hot war described in Don Dencker's book, *Love Company*. If you have not read this book you should. While I struggled with five other books about the Battle of Okinawa, when I came to the Okinawa section of Dencker's book, I simply could not put it down until I finished it.

The book brought back memories of the 1995 Commemoration of 50 years of Peace on Okinawa. My wife and my sister Mary and I attended that commemoration with a group of Army veterans. On a walking tour as we were gazing out at Flattop I heard, "This is where I got my souvenir", from one of the veterans referring to his purple heart. And as our group approached Conical Hill, Herman Buffington a 96th veteran who is here today said to me, "This is where I was one evening sniping a Japs. I was using an experimental night scope. I noticed a bunch of officers behind me, and my sergeant led one of them up to me. I assumed he was high ranking, but he was in fatigues and I could see no rank. He asked to borrow my rifle and wanted me to look through his binoculars and see how he was shooting. He began firing at the Japanese who were over a mile away. They apparently thought they were safe enough to cook their food out in the open. But this officer got right on target. With his binoculars I could see his shots caused at least two Japanese to crumple and get carried off. I knew this officer had rank, but I knew he wasn't Easley or Bradley [BG Easley & MG Bradley of the 96th]. It was not until after he left my sergeant told me it was the 10th Army Commander. The general really enjoyed himself".

General Buckner visited the 96th Division often. I found numerous references to the 96th Division in his diary. I will quote a few:

Apr 7th: “Saw Bradley in his CP at the Agricultural School. Very luxuriously furnished. **Apr 10:** Went to 96th Div CP and took Bradley up to Col. Dill’s regt where OP overlooked the enemy position, but it was too rainy and foggy to see anything. Coming back the roads were so bad we had to substitute a weasel for our jeep”

Apr 13: Visited Mulcahy and Dill at the Yontan airfield. The latter (382nd Rgt CO) is on crutches from a sprained knee damaged by his jumping into a fox hole when a 20 mm shell went through his tent”.

Apr 14 Went to 7th and 96th Div CPs. Bradley sick in bed, apparently with nervous indigestion from his long strain. Easley thought that all he needed was a rest.. Bradley reports killing 600 of 900 counter-attacking him two days ago

Apr 16 Spent the day visiting CPs of XXIV Corps, 27th Div and 96th Div. Also went to 2 forward Ops in the 96th area to look over the enemy position. Bradley appears in better health and spirits than he was two days ago. Attacks being prepared.

Apr 19th: Went via 96th CP to OP of Col Dill in 96th zone. Resistance much stiffer there.

Apr 21 Visited Bn OP in 381st Inf Regt of Col Halloran. His right Bn Commander thinks 27th Div on his right is not helping him as much as contemplated.

May 13 Joined Col May in 383rd Inf OP overlooking attack on “Conical Hill” His handling of the Regt was a beautiful piece of troop leading. I could watch the Bn & company movements easily from the OP and even see Japs, effect of fire, etc. I was there over four hours. May should be promoted to Brigadier General.

May 14 Col May advanced his regiment along the coastal flat 2400 yards and took the Yonabaru airstrip. The Japs still hold the far side of Conical Hill.

May 20 visited 6th and 1st Marine Div and 96th Div CPs. An air of optimism exist in the front-line divisions who seem to feel slight weakening in the Japs before them, in spite of the fact that the most savage of hand-to-hand fighting is going on all along the line.

May 21 Visited both Corps and all four Div CPs and went to foreword Ops of all

but the 1st Marine Div. Got a good view of the left from Conical Hill. Our front line troops are showing a gradually increasing feeling of optimism, particularly in the 96th Div”.

On May 28th, during the Plum rains, in a letter to his wife, the General wrote the following, **“Bradley, who commands the 96th Division, was on a particularly slippery range of clay hills when the heaviest of the rain struck him. In his daily report of movement he reported, ‘Considerable movement by my front lines. Those on forward slopes slid forward and those on reverse slopes slid back’”**

The diary continues:

June 5 Hodge called up and said that Col May, 383rd Infantry, 96th Div, had been killed near Ihwa. I regarded him as the best Regimental commander in the Tenth Army. Had just recommended his promotion.

June 14 Spent day visiting Bn Ops in 96th and 7th Divisions. Got a good look at the hostile position. On way back stopped at the two Division CPs. Arnold and Bradley in high spirits, having each gotten a Bn. and a number of tanks on top of the plateau and well into the enemy position. The new colonel of the 383rd infantry was badly wounded, and his successor had just arrived when I arrived at the OP. Last night a Bn advanced into a mine field. Lost 3 company commanders and a Bn staff officer and fell back. They are cleaning out the mine field today.

June 17th contained his last diary entry, for on the 18th he was killed at an 8th Marine Regt. OP by enemy artillery fire on the Maezato Ridge.

In June of 1995, fifty years later, I stood on that same ridge which now has splendid memorials to General Easley and Colonel May in addition to the marker where General Buckner was killed. Next to the marker is a stone cross and tablet which says, **“In Memorial - The Okinawan, American, Japanese Victims of the Battle for Okinawa May Their Souls Rest in Peace! The society of the First Heavy Field Artillery Regiment, Japan, Jun 18, 1985. S. Ishihara”**.

And that is not the only Japanese memorial which honors Americans. The Mabuni Peace Park on the island is laid out like our Viet Nam Memorial with granite walls and it covers many more acres than the Viet Nam Memorial because those granite walls record alphabetically over 200,000 names, in three groups: All

the Japanese, Okinawan and American war dead. If you find it hard to understand that the Japanese would honor American dead, you will be astonished to know I have photograph of Japanese Buddhist priests performing a ritual at General Buckner's monument. And you will find it even harder to understand that I have another photograph which shows Mrs. Ushijima, widow of the Japanese 32nd Army Commander, on her knees placing flowers on my father's monument. Considering the respect the Japanese show for American war dead, you are right in presuming they show immense respect for their own dead. In addition to the granite walls I mentioned, each Japanese prefecture has its own memorial park. They are so attractive they seem to compete with one another. On an individual scale, we noticed offerings of food, flowers, and ribbons at cave openings and numerous other places where fighting had taken place.

And it is to commemorate our own fallen we are gathered here today. My father did this in with these words. which he spoke to the assembled 10th Army chaplains on Okinawa. These were his words: **“For the men who in the full bloom of youth with life and with happiness ahead of them to give up their lives so that the principles for which they fought might live on, their memory will live on to inspire future generations. Whatever may be a man's creed or form of worship, when he dies for a principle, he has displayed the quality upon which all religions are built, that of faith. These men who now lie silently beneath the soil have found a soldier's resting place showing faith in their country, faith in their cause, and faith in God.**

Gen Buckner, in his victory speech one which he wrote a day or two before he was killed, praised the Tenth Army and told them they should be proud that they killed 12 Japanese for every American Killed. I note in the 96th Division Presidential Unit citation that this division killed 25 Japanese for every 96th Div member killed. The 96th was that kind of outfit.

And that is why I am proud to be wearing this 96th Division double diamond pin Buffington gave me. Thank you.