

# Little Billy

## Introduction

In World War II over 2,000 Baker County men and women served in the armed forces, almost nine percent of the county's 17,000 residents. The Veterans War Memorial on the grounds of Baker County Courthouse lists in bronze the names of eighty-eight Baker County WWII servicemen who died during the war, seventy of them killed in action. Those seventy men's names are also among names inscribed in granite on the Oregon WW II Memorial dedicated on Veteran's Day 2012 on the grounds of the Oregon State Capitol ([www.oregonwwiimemorial.com](http://www.oregonwwiimemorial.com)).

Among the names on both memorials is that of Baker City native John William Studer, who joined the Marines right after Pearl Harbor. He volunteered for and was chosen to serve in an elite commando unit called Carlson's Raiders. Studer, known at home as "Bill" or "Billy," was killed November 1, 1943, during the D-Day assault of Bougainville Island in the South Pacific. This is his story. His war experiences are revealed in Bill's letters and in the memories of his comrades in arms and his friends at home.

## Studer's Family and Early Years



*Paul, Bill, Edith (Grover's second wife), and Grover (father of Paul and Bill)*

John William "Bill" Studer was born in Baker, Oregon, on September 18, 1920, to Grover C. Studer (1892-1956) and Edith Golden Weitz Studer (1891-1931). A newspaper item announced his birth: "Mr. and Mrs. Grover Studer are the parents of an eight pound boy born this morning at their home on Cedar Street. Both mother and son are doing nicely." Bill's brother, Paul (1914-1994), was six years older than Bill and his only sibling. As adults Bill and Paul were easy to distinguish, since Paul at 6' 1" towered over his little brother, whose height topped out at about 5' 6". Brother Paul married Evelyn Love of the Love family of Goose Creek in Keating Valley. Evelyn's brother was

Bob Love, who died in 2012. Paul and Evelyn named their only child, William Studer (1945 - ) now living in Osage, Iowa, after his "Uncle Bill."

Bill's paternal grandparents, William and Anna Catherine Studer, came to Baker City from Ogden City, Utah, around 1903. William was born in England in 1850 and immigrated to the U.S. at age 18. Anna was born in Sweden in 1858 and immigrated to the U.S. at age 15. While in Utah, William and Anna had six children. The 1900 Ogden City census shows the family consisted of William, age 50, Anna, 41, and children Fred, 21, Florence, 17, Grover, 8, Albert, 5, and Alice, 2. The sixth child, Mary, was born in 1901. Shortly after her birth, the family moved to Baker City, where William died in 1904. Anna outlived her husband by 40 years, residing at 1074 Elm Street until her death in 1944 at age 88.

Bill's maternal grandparents were John Weitz (1857-1945) and Frances Weitz (1860-1936), both born in Missouri, where they married in 1884 and raised four children. The 1900 census shows the family living in Miller, Missouri, located in the southwest corner of the state: John, age 44, Frances 45, and children Maude, 16, John E., 14, Edith, 11, and Ella, 4. Also living in the household was John's father, John D. Weitz, age 70, an immigrant from Germany. The 1910 census shows the family living in Baker City with the exception that John D. Weitz is no longer listed and had probably died in Missouri.



*Bill and Paul Studer*

Upon first arriving in Baker City, the Weitz family lived at 1931 Clifford Street. Also living with them was Sarah J. Golden (1825-1913). She was probably the mother of Frances Weitz, since daughter Edith's middle name was Golden and Sarah is buried in the Weitz family plot at Mount Hope Cemetery in Baker City. John Weitz found work as a chauffeur and later worked in the horse stable located on the northwest corner of Main and Auburn streets (today the site of Oregon's tallest building east of the Cascade Mountains.)

The 1917 Baker City Directory lists John Weitz as farmer, but the family resided in town at 1843 East Street. Daughter Maude lived with her parents and worked as a clerk at M. Weil Co., a clothing store. The name of their son, John E. Weitz (1886-1980), does not appear in Baker City directories until 1930, when he is listed as a farmer residing with his wife, Ida Hill Weitz (1885-1944), at 3060 6<sup>th</sup> Street, an address that no longer exists. (The street was vacated to make room for the new high school.) Within a couple of years, John E. and Ida acquired a farm on the north side of H Street near its intersection with Grove Street. John E.'s father may have been the owner, retired, and turned it over to his son. The elder John Weitz's name no longer appears in city directories, although he did not die until 1945. Today the remodeled farm house still abuts agricultural land on its north side.

The 1908 Baker City Directory lists sixteen-year-old Grover Studer as clerking for Dilsheimer, Foreman & Co., a dry goods store at 1836 Main Street, and living with his mother, Anna, at 1074 Elm Street. Since he is not listed as a graduate of Baker High School, he had probably dropped out of school to work. In about 1912 Grover married Edith Weitz. Their first child, Paul Studer, was born in 1914. Six years later their second and last child, John William "Bill" Studer, was born, probably named for his maternal grandfather, John Weitz, and paternal grandfather William Studer. Grover is mentioned in just two other Baker City directories. In 1925 Grover was a partner in Studer & Wright Shoes at 1910 Main Street and resided at the intersection of Cedar and C streets. In 1935 Grover had a women's clothing store called the Cinderella Shop at 1809 Main and was residing with his second wife, Edith M., at 1880 Clark Street.



*Billy Studer at age 14*

Bill's mother, Edith Weitz Studer, died in 1931 at age 40, when Bill was just 11 and Paul was 17. A few years later, Grover moved to The Dalles, where he again operated a shoe store. Bill remained in Baker City living the rest of his childhood with Uncle John E. Weitz, his mother's brother, and John's wife, Ida, on their farm on H Street. Bill's Aunt Ida was known as a gentle, loving person. But a couple of sources who knew the family say that life with Uncle John was not easy. Simply put, John was mean—mean to Ida and to Bill and to his animals. "He kicked Bill's butt," says a childhood playmate of Bill. And, although Uncle John may not have physically abused Ida, Bill's former playmate noted that John "was always hollering at her during haying, because she didn't drive the milk cart right." And he abused his horses. On one occasion neighbors called the sheriff to report John was beating a horse held steady for the blows by a farm hand.

Other relatives: Bill's cousin Francis, daughter of his maternal aunt Ella Weitz Vaughn, married Lawrence Lew of Lew Bros. Tire Shop. Major Lew was a company commander in the famed Merrill's Marauders of the Burma Campaign of 1944. And his cousin Bette Hoge, daughter of his paternal aunt Mary and Earl Hoge, a Baker businessman, was first lady of Nevada through her marriage to Governor Grant Sawyer.

## High School

Having lost his mother and his father having moved to The Dalles, Bill stayed with Uncle John and Aunt Ida to complete his schooling. Whereas living with "mean" Uncle John may have helped toughen Bill for the Marines, school provided a humanizing counter-balance to his home life. Yearly editions of the "Nugget," Baker High School's yearbook, cover Bill's freshman through senior years (1934-1938) revealing a very active life outside his uncle's home.



*Freshman Class Officers  
Pres. Orville Ragsdale, Sec. Ruby Turner, VP Bill Studer*

Bill was in the Baker High School graduating class of 1938, a class year made famous by its basketball team that won the Oregon State championship, a competition which in those days involved every school in the state. Some of Bill's classmates' names are still familiar today: Don Brinton (of the Brinton newspaper family), Martin Chaves (outstanding lineman for Oregon State University football team and brother of Art and Francis), Glen Hall (later a plumber in Baker), Barbara Head (reputedly Bill's girlfriend), Bob Jack (of Jack's Third & B Market), Granville Lee (Myrtle Lee, his mother, was Baker County School Superintendent and coordinated the WWII "Good News Letter," newsletters sent monthly to Baker County service men and women all over the world), Bob Ott and Orville Ragsdale (both members of the 1938 champion basketball team), Doris and Orville Rohner (of the dairy family), and Fred Schreeck (of the Schreeck's coal and ice cream family).

The list of activities that accompanies Bill's senior picture in the 1938 "Nugget" shows the diversity of his interests in high school: "Bill Studer: Scientific (major area of study); 'Stewed' (humorous variant of 'Stude'); Future: Governor; Class V.P. 1; Dramatics 1-3; Pep Club 1-4; Fire Squad 2-4; Debate 4; Dramatics Club 3; Football Yell Leader 3; Winter Sports 3; C. of C. Club 3; Torch Honor 2-4; Speech Arts Festival 2; Toastmasters Cup 3." Omitted from sophomore-year activities was his membership in the Newswriting Club, which wrote school articles for the local "Democrat-Herald"

newspaper. And he also wrote for the "Nugget," signing one piece "Bill banana-a-day STUDER."

Most striking about the summary of high school activities is Bill's future ambition to be "Governor." Whether that was a serious goal or not, in fact Bill showed early leadership ability. His classmates elected him Vice President of their freshman class and he was secretary of Torch Honor Society his sophomore year. Further, he demonstrated oratorical skill by participating in the Speech Arts Festival his sophomore year, by winning the Toastmasters Cup his junior year, and by being on the debate team his senior year. This impression of Bill is confirmed by a Marine buddy who wrote, "Bill is very quick witted" and "never loses an argument." Bill's membership in the Torch Honor Society from sophomore through senior years indicates that he excelled academically.



*Torch Honor Society--Billy in the middle*

Bill appears in many of the photos in the yearbooks. What strikes one is his diminutive stature compared to other students. In every photo Bill is the shortest boy, even shorter than almost all the girls. A buddy who served with Bill in the Marines sized him up this way, "He's 22 years old and just a runt! About 5' 6", weighs a scant 145# maybe." In a 2012 phone interview, 89-year-old Ben Carson of Hillsboro, Oregon, who was in a different company but same Marine battalion as Bill, was asked if he knew Bill Studer, who at 5' 6" may have been one of the smallest Marines in the battalion. Carson's response was, "I'm 5' 6"!" To the question what did he say to get accepted into the elite Carlson's Raiders, Carson replied to his interviewer and Executive Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Raider Battalion, Captain James Roosevelt, son of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "I make a smaller target."

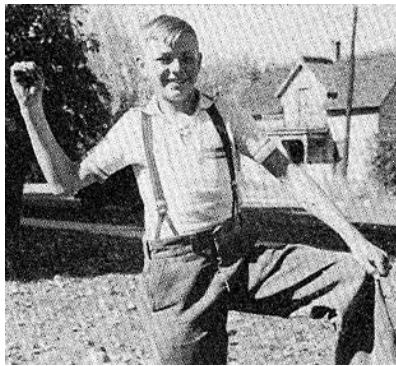
From his freshman year on, Bill acted in high school plays and worked on stage crews. Early on Bill made a lasting impression on his dramatics teacher, Alice M. Osborn, with his witty way of obtaining permission to speak. "Bill was a freshman in my senior class in Dramatics. He would raise his hand and say, 'May little Billy venture an opinion?'" In the 1936 yearbook, Osborn, wrote about Bill, who was already in the Advanced Dramatics class, "The Sophomores were active in Beginning and Advanced Dramatics, to which they contributed the incomparable, ingenious, indomitable Studer."

Yearbook photos of scenes from plays, unlike today's Face Book video clips, typically give no basis for judging actors' abilities. In a photo from the 1936 play "Submerged,"

about a crew's entrapment on the bottom of the ocean in their disabled submarine, five crewmen are obviously feigning horror at their predicament, except Bill, whose face expresses a convincing mixture of concern, fear, and sadness.

Bill was on the Fire Squad his last three years in high school. During fire drills it was the squad's duty to open exit doors, close all windows, check to make sure everyone left the building in an orderly manner, and to man the fire hoses and extinguishers. Bill is one of 32 young men in a Fire Squad photo. In the front row is Bill's child-like image looking at the camera from behind a roll of fire hose.

Bill was in the Pep Club during all four years of high school. In the 1937 yearbook one reads, "For the football season Yell King Bill Studer presided at assemblies and football games." Carl Kostol (BHS '40) remembers Bill as a cheerleader at sports events. "Bill was a real live wire," Kostol says. In a WWII newsletter, George Wise had a similar comment referring to Bill as "the peppy little yell king we knew in high school." In the junior year photo of the 25-member Yell Club, Bill is barely visible among his fellow cheer leaders--all taller than him, except for the girl standing next to Bill, Barbara Head, president of the Pep Club and reputed to be his girlfriend.



*Football Yell King Bill Studer*

In the 1936 group photo of the Torch Honor Society, Bill is standing right below George Hirata, one of a number of students of Japanese descent attending Baker High School. In a few years Bill would be fighting Japanese, and persons of Japanese decent would disappear from Baker. But in the late 1930's and early 1940's, Baker had a small Japanese community. And the students that attended Baker schools were accepted as equals and many excelled as students. Baker City directories of those years show thirteen Japanese surnames: Akiyama, Hayashi, Hirata, Kajikawa, Kobayashi, Kurata, Mizushima, Ohta, Okafuji, Rokui, Shintani, Yamaoka, Yamano, Yano, and Yasui. Graduating with Bill in 1938 were George Hirata, Ethel Kajikawa, and Katherine Yamaoka. Carl Kostol says that Rose Yasui was valedictorian of his class of 1940. Yukio Yano (BHS '43) became a chemist pioneering in radioactive isotopes used in medical imaging. After the war not one of those families was still living in Baker.

In spite of all the academic potential Bill exhibited in high school, plus his stated goal to be “governor,” he did not attend college after graduation. Instead he worked at Basche-Sage Hardware Co., a job he started while still a student. The 1941 Baker City Directory has him still working at the same job but living at Joyce Reddick’s boarding house at 1525 4<sup>th</sup>. Bill continued acting in plays after graduation. In November 1941, Myrtle Lee wrote in a WWII newsletter, “Bill Studer is taking the lead in a home talent play to be given at the high school this week. He kept us all in convulsions last night with his jokes and telling us the quips they get off around the table at the Reddick boarding house. Bill has just turned 21.”

One month later Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

### Bill Joins the Marines

Beginning in November 1941, Myrtle Lee and a group of volunteers began sending out monthly newsletters to Baker County servicemen and women. Just one month later Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. went to war. And so did Bill Studer. In the January 1942 issue of the “Baker Good News Letter,” as the monthly newsletters were called, Lee wrote, “Bill Studer couldn’t wait to register for the draft. Has gone to the Marines. Bill Studer has done a characteristic thing in choosing a dangerous branch of the service, because he believes it to be his best chance of making his work count for good.” Bill left Baker for San Diego on January 3, 1942.



*Carlson's Raider Bill Studer*

Several weeks later Bill wrote to Lee about joining Carlson’s Raiders, which by December 1942 was the most heralded unit in the Marines. “When I completed my boot camp training, I volunteered for a special combat unit known as the ‘Raider Battalion,’ as it seemed to promise the most action the quickest. We have had 6 more weeks of intensive training and are now scheduled to go aboard ship immediately. This new outfit is being formed on the same lines as the British Commandos and the training has been very exhaustive and strenuous with little time for recreation.” Lee commented, “What a wonderful job Bill will do with his high intelligence, quick thinking and utter fearlessness. He’ll keep his co-workers in good spirits. Luck to you, Bill!”

In January 1942, Marine Major Evans Carlson was given permission to form a special battalion trained to sneak ashore in rubber boats and conduct operations behind enemy lines. The new battalion and one forming on the east coast under Colonel Merritt Edson were the precursors of U.S. military special ops units, such as the Army Rangers, Green Berets, and Navy Seals.

Carlson had gained valuable guerilla experience in China in 1937, when he accompanied the Chinese Eighth Route Army on a thousand-mile trek harassing the Japanese army. Chinese guerilla tactics, which Carlson employed to good effect at Guadalcanal in November 1942, were summarized by Chinese Communist leader Mao Tsetung: "Enemy advances, we retreat; enemy halts, we harass; enemy tires, we attack; enemy retreats, we pursue." Carlson was impressed by the ability of Chinese soldiers to travel great distances on meager rations with no one falling by the wayside, which Carlson attributed to their knowing exactly what they were fighting for. Carlson later adopted as his unit's motto the Chinese words "gung ho" meaning "working in harmony." And he instilled in his Raiders an appreciation of the democracy and liberty they enjoyed at home.

Carlson sent reports from China directly to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with whom he had developed a close relationship in 1935, when he was second in command of Roosevelt's protective detachment at the presidential retreat at Warm Springs, Georgia. In January 1942, Carlson's executive officer of the newly forming special battalion was none other than the president's son, Captain James Roosevelt. Several months later Roosevelt would go on to command his own battalion of Marine Raiders.



*Marine Studer with M1 Rifle*

Eighty-year-old Ben Carson wrote of volunteering to be a Raider. Bill Studer no doubt had an experience similar to Carson's, plus they had something else in common—they were both rather short. "Within the first week after boot camp," wrote Carson, "a rumor spread through the company area that everybody would have a shot at joining a 'suicide' battalion some nutty major was setting up to go into China and infiltrate the Japanese-held territory." In spite of the scary description, Carson decided to volunteer.

“As I waited in line,” wrote Carson, “I was surrounded by men who were capable of making much bigger and deeper tracks in the mud than I could, so I pretty well dismissed the idea of being a Raider.” But after being interviewed by Captain Roosevelt, to Carson’s surprise he was selected. “We were given about 45 minutes to gather our gear” and a ride to Jacques Farm (Camp Elliott), a desert area a few miles northeast of San Diego. They built their own secluded training camp and lived under field conditions, including cooking their own meals. Carlson believed in a command structure that was more democratic than that practiced in the Marines. It introduced equality between officers and enlisted men and decisions made through collective consensus. All officers lived under the same conditions as the lowest private, and troops were encouraged to speak their opinions freely.

Carlson knew the type of men he wanted—men who knew what they were fighting for. And he wanted to know, Can you cut a Jap’s throat without flinching? Can you choke him to death without puking? Can you hike fifty miles in a day? Are you willing to starve and suffer and go without food and sleep? If he got the right answers, he’d stand up and say, “I promise you nothing but hardships and danger.” The leaders determined that both Ben Carson and Bill Studer had the right stuff. Out of 7,000 volunteers, they were two of the 1,000 selected.

From March 25 to April 18, Carlson’s Raiders practiced amphibious landings in inflatable craft at San Clemente Island off the coast of San Diego. Then on May 8 they shipped out of San Diego arriving May 18 at Pearl Harbor, where they set up camp at Camp Catlin. Just three days later C and D companies found themselves unexpectedly sailing 1,300 miles northwest to Midway Island. Their surprise mission was to defend the island from an imminent Japanese attack. Bill was in C Company.

## Battle of Midway

The Americans had broken the Japanese code allowing Admiral Chester Nimitz to know that Japan planned to attack Midway around June 1, 1942. With no time to get more troops from the mainland, Nimitz ordered ground defenses reinforced from Hawaii. Nimitz’s instructions were to fight to the last man and last bullet.

When the Raiders came ashore at Midway, they were still wearing the dirty clothing they had on when they left the States. Historian John Wukovits in his history of Carlson titled “American Commando” described them as “ferocious-looking Raiders,” “unshaven, grimy,” and as “strutting arsenals, sporting knives dangling at their sides, bandoliers (of ammo) sloping across their shoulders, and hand grenades bulging from their pockets.”

Trained to sneak behind enemy lines and fight as guerrillas, the Raiders’ first combat assignment was to stop an enemy invasion. Pfc. Thomas Tobin of C Company believed, “Midway was going to be another Wake Island,” which the Japanese had taken in December 1941. The Marines and civilians that survived that invasion were not liberated until the end of the war. Tobin said, “Some men didn’t think that C and D

were coming back." Neither did high command, which required that Carlson and Roosevelt remain in Hawaii.



*Midway Atoll. C Co. on upper island.*

The Raiders strung barbed wire in the surf and planted land mines. Since the coral was too hard for digging and the water table was too high, they built above-ground sandbag bunkers to protect themselves from bombing and strafing. At 6:30 a.m. on June 4 the Raiders' baptism of fire began. Pvt. James Van Winkle of C Company described it as "the most terrifying experience of my life. I imagined the whole Jap Army making a landing on my beach." (Van Winkle's grandson is Baker Middle School teacher Dan Van Winkle.)

But the planned invasion did not happen. No Japanese troops landed during the Battle of Midway, which was won at sea and in the air. After three days the battle ended in a devastating defeat of the Japanese fleet. But the three days of bombing of Midway was intense and extremely accurate, including demolishing a command post killing Maj. William W. Benson. In total eleven men on the ground were killed and eighteen wounded, but no Raiders were injured.

Hollywood director John Ford was on Midway filming a documentary. (Narrated by Henry Fonda, it won the 1942 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Subject.) Ford said of the ground troops, "I have never seen a greater exhibition of courage and coolness under fire in my life.... Those kids were really remarkable." The Raiders were greatly relieved at the American naval victory. One Raider commented, "For Christ's sake, if those Nips had been able to land, we would have been faced with thousands of them. What could two companies have done? We were just sacrificial lambs, that's all. Thank God the Navy saw they didn't get ashore!" On June 21, after assisting in clean-up of bombing damage, the Raiders of companies C and D arrived back in Hawaii.

After being bombed and strafed at Midway, Bill wrote home, "It's been a long time between letters but out where we've been communications are not so good." Due to wartime censorship, Bill did not mention Midway, rather just expressed appreciation for receiving "Mr. Sutherland's box of books and Thel's candy. Believe me, they were both like bundles from heaven." He closed with, "Hold down the Home Front and we will hold this one down."

Myrtle Lee had a special place in her heart for Bill. They both belonged to the Methodist Church, so Lee had probably known him since he was a young child. In the August

1942 newsletter, Lee took delight in reporting that the "Democrat-Herald" had published a photo of Bill in uniform. "The next morning 90% of the girls in town were walking around in a daze." She added, "Can't blame them much."

Censorship rules required that men in a combat zone could not say where they were or describe any of the battles they may have participated in. Therefore, many servicemen's letters were rather boring. But Bill's letters home were never boring. When Lee received an infrequent letter from Bill, she atypically quoted long passages in the monthly newsletter. In the September 1942 newsletter she printed Bill's whole letter, which showed how observant he was of his fellow Raiders:

"Well, we've finally stopped for a little while and I'm grabbing this chance to drop you folks a line. We've been having a pretty rugged time out here lately but things have calmed down a little and we're sort of catching our second wind. Received your letter and enjoyed it no end. Sure wish I could tell you where I was at the time I received it. Incidentally I've been at a different place every time I received one since the Jan. & Feb. ones I got at the San Diego Base. Can't help but wonder where I'll be when I receive the next one. Sure enjoy getting all the dope from home and hearing from the gang. We're sure getting scattered to the four corners of the earth, aren't we?

"I finally ran across an Eastern Oregonian in the Marine Corps. I'd just about given up hope of ever finding one out here, when I ran across this boy. His name is Art Kirby and he's from Durkee. It must be pretty nice to be in an outfit that's all from the same place, but then on the other hand half the fun in this outfit is the different guys from all over the country.

"You'll hear guys from New England with their 'rauther,' fellows from Kentucky with their 'you all' and 'sho' nuff,' boys from Texas who say 'Howdy' and 'I reckon,' men from Chicago with their 'youse guys' and 'deeze and doze' and 'I theenk.' Fellows from Wisconsin who say 'Make out the light' and 'Borrow me a dollar' instead of 'Put out' and 'Loan me.' You find that Texans will argue savagely among themselves about east Texas or southwest Texas or Austin or Eagle Pass or anything until one of us 'Yankees' steps in and then they will stand shoulder to shoulder against you. And in Oklahoma any time after noon is 'evening.' Maine is just as proud of her spuds as our Idaho is, and all you have to do to uncover a Minnesota lad is to start arguing college football, and to discover a Florida boy just start bragging about your native state's weather. There's fellows in here who can speak Polish, Italian, Spanish, German, French, French-Canadian, and even Egyptian (no kidding!). But East-West-North-South we're all here for the same purpose. I think that purpose is understood without saying but I might add that we intend to really make a good job of it this time. Hello to all the gang."

On September 6 Carlson's battalion of 750 men left Pearl Harbor and sailed 3,500 miles southwest to Espiritu Santo Island of the New Hebrides chain of islands, which is 1,200 miles east of Brisbane, Australia, arriving on September 22. Their trip took them via Canton Island, Fiji Islands, and New Caledonia. On Espiritu Santo they set up Camp

Gung Ho, named for the battalion's motto. It would be their training base for the next several weeks.

### **The Long Patrol**

The site of the first United States land action in the Pacific was on Guadalcanal Island in the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific, 600 miles northwest of Espiritu Santo. Here's what led to that strategic decision. Japanese expansion in Asia began in 1931, when China invaded Manchuria. Then in 1937 Japan attacked Peking, Shanghai, and Nanking. At the time of the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor and Wake Island, Japan simultaneously began the invasion of the Philippines and the Pacific islands further south and east, including Wake and Guam islands. By August of 1942, Japan had conquered Singapore, Burma, and many of the islands of the Southwest Pacific. In July 1942, the Navy learned that Japan was building an airfield on Guadalcanal from which they could launch attacks on allied warships in the South Pacific in aid of its expansion into Southeast Asia. The U.S. needed to deprive Japan of the airfield, which U.S. high command considered an "unsinkable battleship."

In early August 1942, Marines of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion and Army forces drove the Japanese from their new airfield and named it Henderson Field in honor of a flyer who died in the Battle of Midway. The Americans set up a defensive perimeter around Henderson Field and with great difficulty defended it from over 20,000 Japanese troops on the island determined to take back their airfield. But the major battle for Guadalcanal was fought at sea in the strait north of the island. Japan knew that if they lost the island, the war would be almost impossible to win. Daily naval and air battles were fought in that strait. The small patch of sea earned the name "Iron Bottom Sound" for the 48 warships sunk there, 24 ships of each side. The battle for Guadalcanal continued for several months.

In early November 1942, C and E companies of Carlson's 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion finally got their chance to enter the Guadalcanal fight, if only for a planned two-day mission to provide protection for Army engineers, while the engineers assessed an area of the island as a possible site for another airfield.



*Landing at Aola Bay, Guadalcanal Island, Nov. 4, 1942.*

After a storm-tossed, three-day journey aboard WWI-vintage ships, on November 4 at 5:30 a.m. in a steady rain, 298 Raiders of C, E, and Headquarters companies descended netting into Higgins boats in Aola Bay located 40 air miles east of Henderson Field. Pvt. Bill Studer was among the 129 men in C Company. To the

Raiders' surprise and relief, they encountered no opposition as they came ashore and moved a mile inland to set up a perimeter defense. Nevertheless, they spent an apprehensive first night on Guadalcanal not knowing the location of the enemy or whether they had been spotted.

The next day, after the engineers determined the area was too marshy, Lt. Col. Carlson receive orders from General Vandergrift to stay ashore in order to search and destroy the enemy behind the American-held perimeter around Henderson Field. It was exactly the type of mission the Raiders had trained for.

Bill and some of the hardest Raiders would not come out of the jungle until the first week of December. In 1981, Lowell V. Bulger (1921-1983), a C Company buddy of Bill, wrote a short history of what is known in Marine lore as "The Long Patrol," thirty days operating in the jungle behind enemy lines. In 1956 Bulger was one of the organizers of the U.S. Marine Raiders Association, which has issued quarterly newsletters ever since. For quite a few years Bulger was the newsletter editor. Here's Bulger's summary of the Long Patrol:

"What a luxury after a month on the trail with a pack and a weapon as constant companions, day and night, every minute of a 24 hour day. The lean, gaunt, hollow-eyed Raiders had trekked over 120 miles through steaming hot jungles, burning sudans of open kunai grass, crossing dozens of rivers, streams and swamps intermingled with a series of battles with the enemy Japanese east of the (Henderson Field) perimeter. Daily tropical downpours were alternated with long periods of burning hot sun and no water. Short rations of tea and rice were supplemented with such foods as the natives could scrounge in the bush: papayas, limes, plantains or bananas, etc. Jungle diseases—fevers, fungus, dysentery, sores that refused to heal—literally decimated the ranks of the brave, determined Raiders who strove to fight one more day regardless of the pain and misery, rather than leave their buddies to go on without them."



*One of many river crossings on the Long Patrol.*

The first enemy the Raiders had to deal with was the jungle. The dense foliage was slimy and smelled putrid. Sweat from their exertions in the tropical climate, daily rain, and crossing crocodile-infested rivers up to chest deep kept their only set of clothing constantly wet. Jungle birds and other animals created a cacophony of sounds. And there were creepy, crawly critters of huge dimensions, including four-inch long spiders, three-foot iguanas, large land crabs, scorpions, and leeches.

Worst were the mosquitoes, the source of malaria for which the Raiders took a daily dose of atabrine, a substitute for scarce quinine. As partial protection from swarms of mosquitoes, the men had netting for their heads and socks on their hands, but mosquitoes bit right through clothing, which led to scratching and festering sores.

On November 6 the march began. Companies C and E, accompanied by native scouts, headed single file into the jungle following narrow native trails. The men's clothing was soon soaked in sweat as they hacked their way through liana vines with their hook-like barbs that tore clothing and flesh causing wounds that soon festered and did not heal until long after they emerged from the jungle. Frequent crossing of streams up to five feet deep also slowed their advance. Shorter men like Studer forded the deeper rivers with just their heads, weapon, and pack held above water.

The Raiders had their first encounter with the enemy November 8, when they stopped on the Bokokimbo River to bathe and wash clothes. Suddenly parrots and myna birds fell silent. Then there was the crack of a rifle from across the river. Grabbing their weapons, they forded the river in search of the enemy. They soon discovered a small group skinning a wild pig. They killed two and the others disappeared into the jungle.

In a fire fight, the Japanese soldier, whose personal weapon was a bolt-action rifle, was at a distinct disadvantage against Carson's Raiders. One of Carson's tactical innovations was to expand the traditional nine-man rifle squad to ten men: a squad leader and three three-man fire teams, each team armed with a Garand M-1 semi-automatic rifle, a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), and a fully automatic Thompson sub-machine gun. One team of three men was capable of firing 275 bullets in fifteen seconds.



*Carlson's Raiders crossing a kunai grass field on the Long Patrol.*

That firepower was unleashed on November 14, when a platoon of Raiders and a few native scouts crawled on their bellies to within eighty feet of fifteen Japanese soldiers having a meal break. The platoon leader said, "When you hear my shotgun, that's the signal to give'em hell." At the blast from his shotgun, all Raiders opened fire mowing down every one of the enemy. The shooting was over in under a minute. Then the native scouts, whose families had suffered tremendously at the hands of the Japanese occupiers, moved in and used their machetes to dispatch any soldier still living.

The biggest and costliest firefight ironically took place on Armistice Day, November 11, when the Japanese ambushed C Company on its way to the native village Asamana. On November 10, Marines and Army troops defending Henderson Field had encircled 1,500 enemy, but 700 of them escaped during the night. Early on the morning of the

11<sup>th</sup>, Carlson, having heard of the escape, sent his five companies in different directions in search of the enemy. He ordered Capt. Throneson to take his C Company to patrol the trail to Asamana eight miles west of their temporary camp at Binu village. The other companies patrolled areas further north toward the coast and west toward Henderson Field. At 10:00 a.m., after several hours of march, C Company came to a coconut grove, where they found signs of recent enemy occupation. Continuing west they entered a half-mile-diameter field of tall kunai grass surrounded by jungle on three sides not far from Asamana.



*Drawing of Asamana Ambush of C Company by PFC Edward J. Fischer.*

As the point squad approached the jungle's edge at the far side of the kunai grass field, a machine gun opened up instantly killing the lead Raider. Several other Raiders were wounded or killed in the opening minutes. Further back, the main body of Raiders at first charged forward, but the enemy's intense firing forced them to dive into the grass. Pvt. Lowell Bulger recalled, "The sounds of battle increased to a deafening volume," including fire from Japanese rifles, machine guns, and exploding hand grenades and mortars.

Pvt. James E. Van Winkle of C Company remembered the battle well. His platoon was on point. "The whole platoon got clobbered." Van Winkle managed to make it out of the kunai grass but as runner for the platoon's commander, he was ordered back into the field to deliver a message that mortar fire was being ordered up to cover the company's retreat from the kunai grass. On the way back to the safety of the jungle, "Some snipers lined up on me and I went down," recalled Van Winkle, who was hit three times by snipers. "I was lucky to get out alive."

Other C Company Raiders were trying to extract themselves from the open field as best they could. Bulger and another Raider, who were hiding in the grass, were several hundred yards from the protective cover of the jungle. Crawling on their bellies without snipers seeing the grass move was slow and tedious. When they came upon a wounded Raider, they dragged him along, slowing their progress even more. Several hours passed. Suffering from oppressive heat, lack of water, and exhaustion, in desperation they stood up and carried the wounded man safely to the jungle.

Carlson sent D and E companies to the rescue of C Company ordering them to hit the enemy from the flank and rear. During several hours of fighting and not knowing the strength of the Marines, the enemy faded away rather than make a final stand.

Most of the 120 or so C Company Raiders managed to extricate themselves from the grass field much quicker than Bulger. But company commander Throneson did not regroup his men and mount a flanking attack, as was Carlson's modus operandi in a guerrilla operation. When Carlson arrived at the kunai grass field at 4:30 a.m. on the morning after the battle, he was upset that the only offensive move Throneson had taken was to employ his mortars. Three days later, Carlson relieved Throneson of his command, as well as one of Throneson's platoon leaders, Lt. Theodore Tunis, commander of Weapons Platoon.

The day after the Asamana battle, Raiders made a gruesome discovery. They found the body of seventeen-year-old Pvt. Owen W. Barber staked to the ground, his face slashed numerous times, and his castrated testicles stuffed in his mouth. Pvt. James F. Clusker, who in the initial hail of bullets had fallen with a stomach wound near the Japanese line, lay hidden in the grass not far from where Barber was being tortured. All night Clusker lay there listening to young Owen's screams.



*Col. Evans Carlson (center) planning strategy in the jungle during Long Patrol.*

Learning of the barbarity committed on Barber, many Raiders lost any qualms they may have had about killing defenseless enemy soldiers. A Raider recalled, "I remember seeing him there. That made us decide, OK, no more prisoners." Since the battalion was holding two Japanese soldiers, whom they could not afford to feed and guard, Carlson asked if there were any men who lost buddies during the battle. When volunteers stepped forward, he ordered them to take care of the prisoners. Several volunteers took the prisoners into the bush and killed them leaving their bodies to rot. The devoutly religious Carlson, son of a preacher, believed in following the Old Testament vengeful creed "an eye for an eye," at least in war time.

C Company's total casualties at the Asamana ambush were five men killed and six wounded, nearly all of them in 1<sup>st</sup> Squad, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon commanded by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Thomas Maitland. Companies D and E suffered ten killed and seven wounded. The enemy lost 120 killed, 24 of that total credited to the ambushed C Company Raiders. According to a November 1942 muster roll, Bill Studer was in Lt. Maitland's platoon. Since Bill did not

survive the war, experiences he may have had in combat may only be inferred from the accounts of those who did survive, such as the foregoing and accounts that follow.

On November 13, Carlson ordered C Company, then camped at Binu, to return and hold Asamana village. Bulger recalled that on the way, "C Company entered some heavy jungle just at dark when it suddenly came under intense, patterned artillery fire. Four rounds whistled in about 50 yards apart, 'WHOOOMP, WHOOOMP, WHOOOMP, WHOOOMP.' Then it moved up 50 yards and four more rounds whistled in. This terrifying fire walked right up to and over us." The C Company radio operator learned that it was friendly fire. A Marine artillery unit thought the area was a Japanese position. Bulger continued, "The firing stopped but not before we had spent 30 fearful minutes trying to dig in on the jungle floor with helmets and our Gung Ho knives between shell bursts, many of which were aerial explosions in the heavy jungle overhanging trees. Two men received minor hits. To be caught above ground in an artillery barrage is no laughing matter. We arrived at Asamana two or three hours later by holding hands, stumbling and falling in pitch black darkness. We fell exhausted in the rain and went to sleep without any food."



*During the Long Patrol, the jungle was also the Raiders' enemy.*

The next day Bulger's squad was stationed "in a lone outpost" across the Metapona River from Asamana. Bulger remembers, "Bill Studer and I were strong stomached enough to bury 18-20 decaying and maggot-infested dead Japs in one small patch of jungle. We rolled the bloated carcass onto a straw sleeping mat and dragged it to the nearest fox hole. Two or three dead to each hole, then we covered them up."

During the rest of their Long Patrol after the Asamana battle, Carlson's Raiders pursued the remnants of General Shoji's 700 troops. Historian Wukovits described Carlson's tactics, "Like hounds nipping at a fox's feet, the Raiders crept up on the Japanese, struck swiftly, then hastily retired in guerrilla-like fashion."

Engaging the enemy in small hit and run skirmishes was not as taxing as other major challenges, such as inadequate food supplies. Typical daily fare consisted of rice, bacon, raisins, and tea, occasionally supplemented with abandoned Japanese rice supplies and rice taken from Japanese bodies, plus what little the Raiders could scrounge from the jungle. If they had fire, they made a stew of it in their helmets. Pvt. Gay said, "You can't believe how hungry you are! You don't think of girls. You don't think of your mother. You think of food."

Although they were often drenched by rain, there was little potable water in the jungle. Adding purification tablets to kill the parasites was vital, since they usually obtained their water from rivers. Nevertheless, most men still ended up with gastroenteritis, diarrhea, hook worms, and dysentery. And everyone suffered from fungus, commonly called jock itch—the result of constantly wet clothing. Pfc. Dean Winters remembers, “We had jungle rot on our crotch and down our legs so bad that we had to stop every once in a while to empty the blood out of our shoes. It was painful. When you're in the field like that, you go, and you can't worry about pain.” Foot fungus often took years to heal.

Nighttime was especially dangerous. Due to the thick jungle canopy, even a moonlit night was dark. Since they couldn't see, men relied on their hearing. One member of a fire team stayed awake listening while the others slept. Sergeant Cook recalled that at night, “you had to learn to separate (jungle) sounds from what a Jap would make. You were on edge almost all the time.” Historian Wukovits wrote, “Pfc. John W. Studer of C Company so vividly recalled those long nights at Guadalcanal that he later composed a five-verse poem titled ‘Just Thinkin’.” Wukovits included the first and last stanzas of the poem in his book “American Commando.”

Bill submitted “Just Thinkin’” to the Marine Corps, which published and distributed it. The poem has also been published in the 1990 Raider memoir titled “Our Kind of War” and twice in the Raider Patch Newsletter (May 1976 and May 2012). The September 1976 Raider Patch Newsletter contains this note from Harold Paul Keller of Brooklyn, Iowa, who was sending in his dues: “That poem by Studer (May '76 Patch) brought back a flood of memories (including) lying out there at night on New Caledonia and listening to Studer & Heumann argue the merits of Sea Power vs. Air Power.” (Both Keller and Werner Heumann of Brooklyn, NY, were members of Bill's platoon.)

On December 4, Bill and the remaining Raiders walked through the perimeter and onto Henderson Field. The sentries were not expecting them, having heard that they had gotten wiped out. Here's one observer's description of them: “They were definitely a seedy looking lot. Virtually all the survivors...had malaria, many were a bright yellow with jaundice, all were haggard and worn from what they had been through, but in spirit they were still a cocky and self-confident outfit.”

The Long Patrol's casualty figures were lopsided: 488 Japanese soldiers killed, compared to sixteen Raiders killed and eighteen wounded. Killed Raiders were buried in the field. Malaria, dengue fever, and other diseases took a much greater toll on the Raiders than the enemy did. Wukovits reports, “Carlson sent back seventy men on November 19, forty on November 25, and another sixty on November 26. Some units, especially C and E companies...saw their strength reduced by 80 percent.”

## Just Thinkin'

Laying out here in the jungle,  
Looking ahead in the mist,  
Helmet pulled over my forehead,  
And tommy-gun clutched in my fist.  
Wonder if Japs are a lurkin',  
Waitin' to rush with a yell,  
Close in with bayonets flashin',  
'Thinking and waitin' is hell!

'Member the parties at "Dago"  
'Member Hawaii's sweet shore,  
Letters neglected, unanswered,  
A couple of months, maybe more?  
Thinkin' of the trail for tomorrow,  
Through mud and over the pass,  
Thinkin' of cold beer in "Frisco"  
Liberties made without pass.

Thinkin' of girls in New Zealand,  
Who thought the Marines were  
"just grand",  
Thinkin' of long days in boot camp,  
Hours of drill in the sand,  
Wonderin' about next inspection,  
Wonderin' if you dare sit down,  
Thinking of chow for tomorrow,  
This thinkin' can sure get you down.

Thinkin' a thought of a transport,  
Awaitin' to speed you toward home,  
Your tropical duty completed,  
No more of this jungle to roam,  
Wonderin' if she will be waitin',  
And maybe shed one happy tear,  
Wonderin' if you should ship over,  
Or maybe stay outside for a year.

Thinkin' a lot of the home folk,  
Tales they'll expect you to tell,  
Memories you've oft tried forgettin'  
Memories of buddies that fell.  
Workin' and fightin' is easy,  
'Thinkin' and waitin' is hell!

PFC. JOHN W. STUDER.  
2d Raider Bn.,  
c/o Fleet PO,  
San Francisco, Calif.

Of those 266 men who landed with Carlson at Aola Bay on Nov. 4, 1942, only 57 walked out of the jungle and onto Henderson Field after a trek of 150 miles in thirty days. Bill was one of just twenty-three in C Company who toughed it out the full thirty days. Starting at about 145 pounds, Bill, who had malaria and other jungle diseases, had probably lost weight similar to Sgt. McCullough, who went from 146 to 91 pounds.

### **Between the Long Patrol and Bougainville**

Carlson's 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion was back at Camp Gung Ho on Espiritu Santo Island shortly before Christmas. Bill was able to catch up on writing letters home. In January 1943, the "Democrat-Herald" printed a letter received by Bill's father, Grover Studer. Due to censorship, Bill did not write about the ordeal he'd just been through on Guadalcanal, nor did tell the home folks of the diseases he was suffering from. He simply wrote, "We have been at Guadalcanal and participated in action against the enemy. In case you've been wondering what I've been doing lately to earn my two dollars a day, that's it."



*Back on Espiritu Santo Island around Christmas time after the Long Patrol. Wiseman (far left) and Studer (bottom center) were both killed on Bougainville.*

Instead of war stories, Bill wrote his father about his South Pacific Christmas. "Well, here it is the 'nite before Christmas' and all through the camp not a creature was stirring, which was lucky for them, because the sentry would probably shoot them. Looks like this would be a pretty hollow Christmas this year for a lot of us....It's all right to be away from home on Easter or Thanksgiving, or the Fourth of July, but not on Christmas." But Bill's closing was upbeat. "Just remember that everything's O. K. and I'm still in there pitchin'. Love, Bill."

Bill also wrote about Christmas to "Mrs. Lee and Gang: Just a note of appreciation and acknowledgement on this last day of a pretty hectic year for your very welcome newsletters. I have received them all to date, and enjoy them no end. I've even quoted excerpts from it to my buddies until I think everybody in the company knows where Baker, Oregon, is....We had a pretty snappy Xmas celebration out here. All things considered. We painted some coconuts green and red, and hung them around. Somebody painted 'Tom & Jerries' on the water bag. We decorated a tree with bright

colored rags, used sand instead of snow, hung Christmas cards we'd received in the mail on it, and even put up a silver star on the top, hastily cut from a tin can. We made some wreaths out of green leaves and tropical flower blossoms and while we couldn't quite capture the spirit of Xmas a year ago, still it helped.

"We even sang a few carols and I couldn't help but smile as I noticed big, husky, six-foot-two Marines singing 'Jingle Bells' with as much vigor, if not harmony, as anyone could ask for from a band of Epworth League (Methodist Church youth group) carolers. Excuse the commercial. I guess it just goes to prove you can always make the best of things no matter if you're at the ends of the earth. As we sang 'It came upon a Midnight Clear,' I couldn't help noticing, a little bitterly I confess, how hollow and farcical those immortal words 'Peace on earth, good will to men' sounded to me out here, after some of our recent experiences.

"I'll admit I'm all mixed up mentally, but I figure a fellow can't do much constructive thinking until this mess is secured, and then I'm going to sit down and figure it all out quietly, at least figure it out to a satisfactory conclusion in my own mind." Bill then tells of a poem written by a Raider in memory of his fellow Raiders who had died. "It is dedicated to our buddies who paid the highest price any man can pay for something he believes in more than life itself. It was recited at the memorial services we held in honor of them and I never expect to see a more beautiful service than that 'Elegy in the Tropics.' (The "Elegy" was given by Col. Carlson before they left Guadalcanal.)

"To all the gang, at the four corners of the earth, in the Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Air Corps and our little comrade-at-arms in the WAAC, from Australia to Alaska, from the Solomons to Siam, a lowly private in the Marine Corps 'way out here in the Pacific' would like to wish you all a Happy New Year and the most of the best for all of 1943."

After Guadalcanal, Bill must have received a letter from his Uncle John and Aunt Ida wishing he could come home. Bill's reply was published in the newspaper. "Everything seems to be proceeding smoothly at present out here. Hope the same is true with you at home. As you can tell by frequency of my letters we're having it easy at present, which is quite a welcome change. I'd like to come home just as much as you would like to have me but it's out of the question and I'd rather be fighting Japs on their own territory than having our coast shelled, bombed and burned. Our commander says the way to win this war is to carry the fight to them, not to wait for them to come to us; and you can't do that in California.

"I am enclosing a copy of an official citation given to our battalion by the commanding general in recognition of the part we took in one phase of the (Guadalcanal) campaign. A battalion isn't a very large body of men and we feel pretty proud to be picked out and commended. I'm pretty proud of that little yellow slip of paper. I don't know whether I could be considered a seasoned marine by now, but with all the deals I've been in, I should be getting a good start. Don't worry about me. I'm out of the immediate combat zone now."

In September 1943, Lowell Bulger wrote his brother, W. Bulger, to tell him about his buddy Bill Studer. The brother sent along a copy to Myrtle Lee, who published it in a "Baker Good News Letter":

"ANALYSIS OF JOHN WILLIAM STUDER known as 'Bill' or 'Stude' or 'John W.' His home address is RFD 1, Baker, Oregon. He's 22 years old and just a runt! About 5' 6", weighs a scant 145# maybe. His byword is 'Powder River Let 'er Buck.' He is beyond doubt the wit of 11 [of] my close friends. He talks long and loud and a lot, but if people would listen they'd learn a lot. He's very quick witted and full of sarcasm. He never loses an argument, for he can always go the other guy one better. He can 'fence' with words better than anyone I have ever met.

"He can cut a man to ribbons with his sarcastic retorts if the person is offensively minded. I've never seen him fight, for he never has to—he wins with words and leaves the other guy chewing his tongue with anger and desperation. He's smart and cool headed, and very well read—wonderful memory. He's decidedly not an egoist however. Strictly one of the boys. We all like him immensely. He's a hard worker and decidedly not a quitter. He's had every tropical disease in the book and some that aren't in the book. Damn good man! He's generous—always doing things for others, but he constantly 'rides' people, his close friends and all. Sensitive people are hurt by his remarks. He's getting bald and sallow-looking, round shouldered and aging fast for one so young.

"He'd make a good leader of men but few of the higher ups recognize his potentialities. He's a morale builder for he keeps one's mind off the moody things with a constant stream of sarcastic criticism and banter. He loves to argue. He'll be a success if he gets started once. He has an Excelsior Philosophy of Life—Onward and Upward."

Lowell's brother added, "This is an exact copy of my brother's sketch of his friend, no punches pulled. My brother, who is back in this country, was truly fortunate in possessing such a friend. Yours truly, W. B." (The letter must have been forwarded to Myrtle Lee after W.B. learned of Bill's death.)

After the Guadalcanal operation, Col. Carlson was reassigned—booted upstairs so to speak—to be executive officer of the regiment. Although he would never lead men in battle again, he participated as an observer in Marine invasions of Tarawa and Saipan, where he was seriously wounded trying to rescue an injured Marine. In the hospital in San Diego Carlson was visited by none other than President and Mrs. Roosevelt.

Carlson's Raiders were devastated by loss of their leader, whom they revered. Carlson's replacement was a boot-and-polish Marine, Lt. Col. Alan Shapley, who did away with Carlson's Gung Ho spirit and democratic principals of leadership. Raider Ashley Fischer later wrote, "With the investiture of Shapley and the departure of Carlson, a real part of us, especially those of us under twenty years of age, went

missing emotionally. It was never the same. Carlson's philosophy stayed with me all of my life."



*After the war, Col. Evans Carlson relocated to Portland, Oregon, where he died of a heart problem in 1947 at age 51. But during the Long Patrol he could out-hike any of his Raiders.*

Carlson and his Raiders received more publicity in the early part of the war than any other combat unit, including big spreads in "Look" and "Life" magazines. Baker people identified Bill Studer in two of the many photos. Hollywood made a movie titled "Gung Ho" about Carlson and his Raiders, for which Carlson acted as a technical consultant. The movie is based on the exploits of Carlson's A and B companies, which on August 17-18, 1942, after a cramped trip of 2,400 miles from Hawaii in two submarines, invaded tiny Makin Island, and killed all 300 Japanese defenders, while losing 30 Raiders. Western star Randolph Scott played Carlson. Other well-known stars in the movie were J. Carrol Naish, Rod Cameron, and Robert Mitchum. (The film is available on Netflix and YouTube.)

After Guadalcanal, the unit was non-functional until the Raiders could recover from malaria and other tropical diseases. In February Carlson's battalion sailed to Wellington, New Zealand, for thirty days of rest and rehabilitation. But after only six days the battalion was called back to Espiritu Santo. In April they sailed to a new camp at Noumea, New Caledonia, for further training. On October 11 the battalion was back at Guadalcanal for a couple of weeks. Then to Efate, New Hebrides Islands, to conduct pre-invasion landings as rehearsal for an assault on Bougainville Island, the northern most and largest island in the Solomon Islands chain. By the time of the Bougainville invasion, Carlson's Raiders had been restructured and attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment. Among other changes, C Company was re-designated F Company.

## Bougainville

Taking Bougainville was important in the allied drive north. From the island's airfields, the allies could launch attacks on the main Japanese naval base just 250 miles north at Rabaul, New Britain Island. The Marine assault was scheduled for November 1 at Empress Augusta Bay on the middle-west side of the island, which was lightly defended; most of the 40,000 enemy troops were on the northern half of the island.



*Descending USS Clymer to the landing craft at Bougainville.*

At the end of October 1943, the battalion sailed from Espiritu Santo harbor to Guadalcanal and on to Bougainville. On Sunday, October 31, the shipboard activities of the troops had changed. There were hardly any pinochle or small-stake poker games and there was a great deal more cleaning of weapons; even the bullets were cleaned and oiled.



*Marines storming the beach at Bougainville.*

Before dawn on the morning of November 1, battle and transport ships were in position off the western coast of Empress Augusta Bay. Naval bombardment of Japanese defenses at planned landing sites began at 6:00 a.m. An hour later Bill and his F Company Raiders began descending the nets and jumping into some of the 200 landing crafts poised to carry eight battalions to shore. At 7:21 a.m., the Naval bombardment ceased, immediately followed by thirty-one aircraft bombing and strafing the area for five minutes. A minute later the first wave of landing craft hit the beach, but not before the Japanese opened up fire on them at fifty yards from shore with deadly accuracy.

Lowell Bulger, who stormed Green Beach 2 with Bill Studer and other F Company Raiders in the first wave, wrote that the landing site "was defended by 279 men entrenched in 18 pillbox bunkers solidly constructed of dirt and coconut logs and coral with connecting trenches, rifle pits, interspaced with light and heavy machine gun nests. F Company had the point and suffered the heaviest casualties during the first two hours, while cleaning out the well-entrenched Jap troops."

Following F and G companies was combat reporter Harold Azine in the next wave of landing craft. "The first thing we see after the ramp went down is twenty yards of open beach, which ends in a tangle of green undergrowth of creepers, vines, and bushes." They cross the black sand on the double and throw themselves into the vegetation. "The men of Companies F and G," Azine continued, "having cleaned up enemy resistance in the vicinity ahead, begin to filter out back toward the beach. I see no casualties among them."

Since F and G companies had landed 300 yards north of their designated landing site, they head out single file down the beach and turn inland to find and hold their next objective, a clearing with a trail running through it. "We can hear concentrated firing from the direction of the trail," wrote Azine. "F and G are there already. A runner from one of the leading companies comes back. He reports that F and G have reached the opening of the trail, advanced inward a short distance, and are now in contact with the Japs. They are being held up by stubborn mortar and machine gun resistance....This particular skirmish along the trail leading from Empress Augusta Bay into the Bougainville jungle lasts about three hours. When it is over the Raiders have driven the Japs back into the hinterland and secured our section of the beachhead."



*Japanese machine gun bunker on Bougainville.*

Achieving their first objectives did not come without cost. Soon after the landing, Lt. Col. Joseph P. McCaffery, who had replaced Carlson as commander of the 2nd Raider Battalion, jumped into a trench, advanced about twenty yards, and was cut down by a Nambu machine gun at the other end of the trench. In an account of the Bougainville campaign, Raider Dan Marsh wrote about the initial phase casualties, "Besides Lieutenant Colonel McCaffery, who died of his wounds aboard the *Clymer*, we had lost Corporal Emmett P Wiseman, Pharmacist's Mate Third Class John G. Howard, Private First Class, John W. Studer, and Private James Riegel, all of F Company." Two hundred enemy were killed.

In July 1982, Dr. Robert B. Krause of San Antonio, Texas, sent in his dues for his membership in the U.S. Marine Raiders Association, accompanied by this note: "I joined the 2nd Raider Battalion (as a corpsman) in March 1943 on New Caledonia and served through Bougainville, Emirau, Guam & Okinawa campaigns....My first casualty was John W. "Bill" Studer, 2F, Baker, OR, who was mangled in both legs and scrotum from a Jap grenade which he saw the Jap throw. He rolled right over on top of it. When I reached him he was chewing his sulfa tablets and he asked, 'Doc, Will I be

able to have kids?' I made a stretcher with two small tree trunks and a Jap blanket from a nearby hut and sent him back to the beach. He died aboard ship that night, 01 Nov. '43."

Back home on November 4, Myrtle Lee and crew were putting together the November "Good News Letter." Lee wrote, "When Ruby was typing page 8, a telegram came to Bill Studer's uncle, John Weitz, saying that Bill had 'died of wounds received in action in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country. Present situation necessitates interment temporarily in the locality where his death occurred, and you will be notified accordingly.'" Lee said that Weitz reported that Bill's brother, Paul, "had heard recently that Bill was right in the pink. Complaining a little because there was nothing exciting happening, which lets you know that he hasn't changed a bit." Lee continued, "Now, he will never change a bit, but live on in our hearts and memories as the impetuous, idealistic, brilliant, witty, lovable Bill."

The following April, Bill's Uncle John received a letter telling the circumstances of Bill's death. It was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. John Weitz—Bill's Aunt Ida Weitz had just died earlier that month—dated April 18 at Camp Pendleton, California, and written by Corporal James Ivers:

"I guess this is about the most difficult letter I have ever tried to write. I don't know what to tell you that would help you. I'm afraid I will hurt you.

"I guess I was the last fellow to be with Bill. Another fellow and I carried him out of the jungle after he was wounded and I never had anything hurt me so in all my life as when I looked down at him. We brought him back to the beach and the doctors took over and I can tell you one thing, everything that was possible, under the conditions, was done to save his life. Our company had to push on, so I had to leave him. I shook hands with him and he made some witty remark. He was always full of jokes. I tried to talk to him and tell him how much of a man I thought he was, but I had a lump the size of my fist in my throat and couldn't say a word.

"I'll try to tell you as accurately as possible what happened. It was on November 1 about 10 o'clock on Bougainville when he got hit. We were stretched out in a line and the Japs were throwing hand grenades. Bill was trying to fill about three holes in the line at the same time and the Japs spotted him. The first grenade lit within two feet of him but didn't hurt him. The next one they threw lit between Bill and another kid. They both rolled but the grenade bounded and lit under Bill and exploded.

"He was a hero through and through and I was proud to have known him. He didn't utter a sound even though he was conscious all the time. He knew it would give away our position.

"I knew Bill when we first got in the Raiders. I always liked him especially for his sharp wit. I have never heard a man get ahead of him in an argument. We spent liberty together in New Zealand. I guess he told you about that and how much fun we had. I

think I can honestly say he had as many, if not more, friends than any man in the battalion.

"I want to apologize to you people for not writing sooner. But at first we were not allowed to write you.

"I broke down and cried like a baby when it happened. So you see all marines are not as hard-hearted as some people think.



*Tulagi Island (red circle) lies north across Iron Bottom Strait from Guadalcanal.*

"Bill is buried on Tulagi Island, which is just about 20 miles from Guadalcanal. I visited his grave. Tell all his friends that we knew him as a man as well as a marine and a darned good one.

"May God bless you and help you in your sorrow." (Ivers died 50 years later in 1995.)

Soon after Bill's death, his platoon leader, 1st Lt. Nelson C. Dale, wrote Bill's Uncle John and Aunt Ida. "I am writing this note to express my deepest regret for the death of your nephew. He was about the finest boy in my company, and I am proud to be his company commander. I never knew a boy to do his job so cheerfully or so well. In action you may well be proud of him as we were. He added much to my company I can assure you. Bill had many, many friends, so your great loss is also our loss. Very sincerely yours, Nelson Dale." (Capt. Dale was wounded on Okinawa on April 2, 1945.)

Bill's drama teacher, Alice Osborn, was teaching in Dos Palos, California, after leaving Baker when her husband, Capt. Martin Osborn was transferred to California. On November 22 she wrote to Myrtle Lee to express her grief. "I can't get 'little Billy' out of my mind. A personality like that of course can never truly die. I remember him so well as a freshman in my senior class in Dramatics, when he would raise his hand and say, 'May little Billy venture an opinion?' One very hard example to take of 'what price freedom!'"

In one of the newsletters Myrtle Lee enclosed sprigs of sagebrush, a big hit with the Eastern Oregon boys far from home. On another occasion the letters contained seeds. George Stewart wrote about what he did with the seeds. "After a great deal of thought I planted those flower seeds around the chapel in the Marine Cemetery at Guadalcanal.

It is a lovely place. Had it been possible to go across the bay to Tulagi, I could have planted them on the grave of my fellow Marine Bill Studer. I can see that island from our camp.”

Pilot instructor Harv Miller wrote from War Eagle Field, located in the Mojave Desert east of Lancaster, California, “We too were very sorry to learn of Bill Studer’s tragic death. He was surely a grand person. The war seems so much worse when we lose our old friends. I hope that everyone who knew him will work and fight much harder to shorten this war and prove that Bill’s sacrifice was not in vain.”

A month after Bill died, Myrtle Lee published a December 1943 newsletter with the heading “IN MEMORIAM.” She wrote, “This seemed the best time to give you some of the tributes paid to Bill Studer by his buddies. A pal, L.B. (Lowell Bulger), wrote the story:

“I’m more than willing to tell you what I can of Bill’s life overseas. Bill told me many times that if anything happened to him that he would like his people to know some things. Bill wouldn’t like us to grieve too much, so I’ll try to write as if he were telling the story.



*Bill’s buddy Lowell V. Bulger was with him at Guadalcanal and Bougainville.  
Bulger was editor of the Raider Patch Newsletter for many years.*

“As you probably know, Bill and I joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Bn. at the same time, Feb. ’42, and Col. Carlson told us many times that we would have to undergo more dangers and hardships than any other military organization. If you have followed the records of our battalion since then you’ll know that what he said was true.

“We left San Diego in May 1942 and went to Pearl Harbor. At that time we were in ‘C’ Company. Three days after we arrived two companies of us ‘C’ and ‘D’ were sent to Midway to repel the coming Jap thrust. On June 4 the Japanese struck Midway and as you remember it was a great sea battle and victory for us. We were bombed and trained there for a few weeks. Two more companies ‘A’ and ‘B’ were picked for the next job. Bill and I didn’t go but you probably wondered about it. That was the Makin Island raid where Carlson’s Raiders first gained the headlines.

“At the same time the Guadalcanal campaign was opened, so as soon as our battalion was together again, we went south to Canton Island, then on down to the Fiji Islands. From there we swung over to New Caledonia, and then up to the New Hebrides. We were the first combat troops on this island. There we set up our base and as we were only 600 miles from the Solomons we were bombed and shelled pretty often. In late October we set out for Guadalcanal and landed there Nov. 4.

“These were the darkest days of Guadalcanal. Only 2 companies of us, ‘C’ and ‘D’, this time went up there at first. Two more companies came a week later and the last two came up about three weeks after we landed. We landed about 40 miles east of the airport at Aola Bay and as this was all Jap country we acted as guerrillas and roamed in the jungle, hitting their supply dumps, trails and fighting a hit and run warfare. We lived off the land, captured Jap rice, coconuts, native roots, etc. For a whole month we roved around behind the Japs. Hitting them and their bases, knocking out artillery and scattering them into the jungle.

“Of course we endured great hardships and we lost a lot of men through disease, sickness and just plain cowardice. At the end of 30 days, Bill and I were 2 of 22 men that came through out of 143 that started. We shared the same bed and meals and we grew very close to one another. It was then that I learned just what a man Bill was. When dozens of others gave up under the strain, Bill was always laughing, joking and keeping up morale. Without men like him we never would have come out alive. He was always cool in battle and the quickest thinking man I’ve ever known.

“We received a citation from Gen. Vandergrift and another from Pres. Roosevelt. We left Guadalcanal on Dec. 14 and returned to our base. This was when the effects of that Guadalcanal campaign really hit us. Infections, diarrhea, dysentery, ringworm, hookworm, malaria, yellow jaundice, and mental fatigue. Bill was hit with malaria 3 times, and yellow jaundice twice, but he recovered okay and later when an examining physician asked if he felt okay to go into battle, he said, ‘Nothing serious, just a few cases of malaria and yellow jaundice and ringworm—I feel fine and ready to go again.’ The Dr. laughed and said, ‘Okay, son, your spirit will carry you a great way.’ It was my admiration of him that kept my spirits high!

“In February we went to New Zealand for 30 days of rest but in 6 days we were sailing back north (as they needed us, they said). Bill and I went on liberty those 6 days. He probably told you how we enjoyed ourselves.

“Back at the New Hebrides our plans fell through again and again each time we were ready to go into battle, and in May of ‘43 Col. Carlson was relieved of his command and sent back to U.S. Our morale hit rock bottom then, for we loved our commanding officer. He was a wonderful man and leader. So our new C.O. moved our battalion down to New Caledonia where the climate was better and there was less sickness.

“Bill and I knew carpenter work, so we two and 8 or 10 more fellows built a brand new camp—mess hall and all. We worked side by side for 6 weeks and he told me so many

of his hopes and fears—his life in Oregon, his home, and his job ‘in the store’ there. Then we trained the new fellows—replacements, and in Sept. Bill and I and another fellow got a special job of building packing boxes, crates, etc., to move our gear in. The whole month of Sept. we worked together and talked and laughed and planned. No matter how bored we were Bill never got down in the dumps.

“Oct. 1 we loaded aboard ship and for the next month we trained and practiced landings for the Bougainville campaign. The morning of November 1, Bill and I and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders said our prayers and landed on Bougainville. Bill was killed that morning not 20 feet from me when we were storming a pillbox. He was given every medical attention possible in battle conditions, but he died with a smile on his lips. He was my best friend and we were closer than brothers.

“Bill is a hero in all of our lives and when I left the outfit he was to be put up for decoration. To me and all my buddies Bill’s loss will never be replaced. I humbly bow my head and salute him!

“I left Bougainville Nov. 8 to come home for aviation training. I would give anything to have brought Bill with me. I know he wants us to carry on as if nothing has happened, so please let’s try to. Bill’s friend, L. B.”

Myrtle Lee closed the December 1943 In Memoriam issue of the “Baker Good News Letters” with these words:

“Bill was a good friend to all of us. He will be missed, but our lives will all be richer because of his friendship. And as a tribute to him these words express our feelings: ‘They live best who, when they are gone, in the lives of others still live on.’”



*John William “Bill” Studer on Main St. ca. July 4, 1941.*

### **Addendum**

The following article appeared in the May 27, 1948, edition of “The Record-Courier”:

"The remains of John William Studer, PFC, U.S. Marine Corps, were interred in Mount Hope Cemetery May 26. He was born 9-18-1920 in Baker, attended public schools, enlisted in Marines in 1941. He had been employed in auto parts dept. of Basche-Sage Hardware. He joined Carlson's raider battalion in February 1942. In the battle of Guadalcanal he was among 22 of 143 in his unit to survive. On the morning of November 1, 1943, he fell while storming a Japanese pill box in the battle of Bougainville, British Solomon Islands. In June 1944 he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star."

Directions to Studer's grave: Enter at the NW entrance (Schmitz Drive) of Mount Hope Cemetery in Baker City, Oregon. Proceed on Schmitz Drive past the first intersection (Birch Street) about 30 yards. The Weitz and Studer family graves are located near the right edge in two rows, all flat stones. As a guide, look for the two tall stones for Reed and Haskell in the next row east of the Weitz and Studer graves.

### The Erroneous Silver Star Citation

In a letter dated June 16, 1944, the Commandant of the Marine Corps announced that the late Private First Class John W. Studer had been awarded the Silver Star medal with citation posthumously. The following citation was enclosed:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with the Second Marine Raider Battalion during a landing attack on Bougainville Island, British Solomon Islands, on November 1, 1943. Observing that concealed sniper fire was retarding the advance of his platoon, Private First Class Studer unhesitatingly rose from cover and proceeded to an open space in order to draw enemy fire and disclose hostile positions. Injured and thrown to the ground by withering enemy opposition, he struggled to his feet and again made himself a target for the Japanese gunners, enabling his platoon to locate and kill the snipers, although he himself was fatally wounded. Private First Class Studer's outstanding initiative and heroic devotion to duty contributed immeasurably to the successful advance of our forces in this vital area and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country. For the President, James Forrestal, Acting Secretary of the Navy."

But, the citation for the Silver Star award does not describe the circumstances of Bill's death.

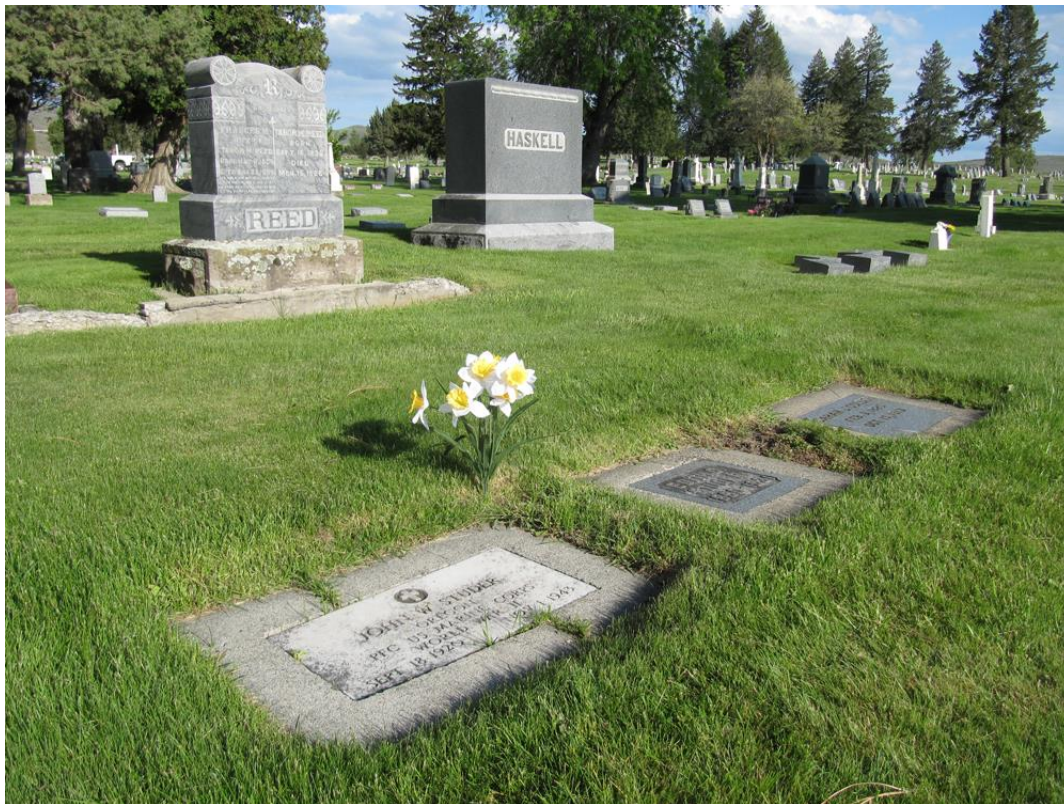
Corpsman Krause said that Bill's injuries were caused by "a Jap grenade which he saw the Jap throw. He rolled right over on top of it." Ivers told Bill's aunt and uncle that Bill evaded one grenade, then the next one "lit between Bill and another kid. They both rolled but the grenade bounded and lit under Bill and exploded." Ivers' account sounds like the description of an accident. But he also wrote, "I'm afraid I will hurt you" by writing the letter. Ivers may have been reluctant to tell Bill's uncle and aunt that Bill had sacrificed himself to save a fellow Marine, rather than trying to keep himself alive, so he might return home to his loved ones. Bulger wrote, "Bill was killed that morning not 20 feet from me when we were storming a pillbox." And Bulger said, "When I left the outfit

he was to be put up for decoration.” Since the military does not cite servicemen for valor just because they died in combat, the “decoration” Bulger alludes to must have been for intentionally smothering the grenade in order to save others.

So why did the military get the Silver Star citation wrong? A probable explanation is that nominations for decorations were sent in for two acts of heroism and they got switched. If that’s the case, then who was the other Raider and what was his citation for? Bill’s actions typically merit receiving the Navy Cross, the Navy’s highest award for valor, or the Congressional Medal of Honor. Did someone in Bill’s unit get credit for Bill’s action by receiving one of those top awards?

On November 1, 1943, four F Company Raiders died in the D-Day assault of Bougainville: Bill Studer, Corporal Emmett P. Wiseman, Private James Riegel, and Pharmacist’s Mate 3<sup>rd</sup> Class John G. Howard. Wiseman received no awards. Howard was awarded the Silver Star medal but for what is not known. However, it’s unlikely a corpsman would intentionally make himself a target for snipers. Riegel received the Navy Cross for single-handedly storming a machine gun nest and knocking it out with grenades thereby losing his life. The actions described in Riegel’s award do not match the eyewitness descriptions of Studer’s death.

It remains unknown who received Bill’s citation.



Bill’s remains were returned from Tulagi Island and reinterred in the family plot at Mt. Hope Cemetery on May 26, 1948.

## JOHN WILLIAM STUDER—ADDENDUM

Author: Gary Dielman

August 25, 2026

As I wrote in my history of John William (Bill) Studer, it's my confirmed belief, that due to confusion in the heat of battle, Bill Studer was erroneously awarded the Silver Star for making himself a target of a Japanese soldier hiding in a tree, which is how his Silver Star citation reads. Here's how Bill really died.

After Bill survived the Long Month behind enemy lines at Guadalcanal, months later on Nov. 1, 1943, Bill and the Marines went ashore on the first day of the Marines landing on the Pacific island of Bougainville. On that morning of the Marines invasion of Bougainville, Bill and fellow Marines were assaulting Japanese machinegun pill boxes. They were close enough that the Japanese in the pill boxes were throwing grenades at the Marines. One grenade landed between Bill and a fellow Marine. Bill threw himself on the grenade so as to save the life of his fellow Marine next to him. After a medic attended Bill's wounds as best he could, Marines made a make-shift stretcher and carried Bill to the shore. From there he was put aboard U.S.S. George Clymer.

Since there was ample evidence of Bill's heroic action, for which action the Navy never was not officially credited to him, I ordered Bill Studer's complete Navy record. That record is proof that Studer did not die by being shot by a Japanese sniper hidden in a tree.

The Senior Medical Officer on board the U.S.S. George Clymer, to which Studer was evacuated on the day he was injured, filled out Studer's "Death Certificate" citing the "Cause of Death" on May 1, 1943:

"Principal: Traumatic amputation of the left leg below the knee:

"Contributory: Partial amputation of the right leg at the knee"; "and partial amputation of the scrotum and contents."

The Navy attached to the Death Certificate a single page:

"PRIVATE FIRST CLASS JOHN W. STUDER, USAMCR"

"Recommended for Navy Cross."

"SECRET."

That recommendation was never acted on by the Navy.

The Navy Cross is the Navy's second highest award for valor, just under the Medal of Honor.