

The ultimate sacrifice by a 'best friend'

A dog bridges the gap between a soldier and the enemy

World War II was not won by men and machines alone. Animals played a little known, yet important part in the quest for victory. Horses were used by the field artillery in the early days, pack mules of the 10th Mountain Division were used in the rugged Apennines of Italy, bats affixed with tiny incendiary devices were destined to be air dropped on the bamboo cities of Japan, pigeons were used to send coded messages in Italy and Burma, and dogs were trained for search and sentry duty.

This week we digress from the usual veteran's story to give a remarkable account of a veteran of a different kind — a war dog — that served two opposing masters.

—Nicholas Loveless

Kiska or Moose: two times a hero

By James J. Hewitt

Butaritari is a tiny strip of sand and coconut palms rising slightly from the Pacific Ocean in the Gilbert Islands. On Nov. 20, 1943, as a machine gunner for the 98th AAA Gun Battalion attached to the U.S. 27th Infantry Division, I was part of the invasion force that landed on this six-mile-long island as the Second Marine Division also landed at Tarawa to the south. After three days of heavy fighting, the islands were secured. For the next few months we were kept busy by air attacks by the Japanese that occupied the Marshall Islands to the northwest.

In February, 1944, the Army and Marines invaded the Marshalls, and our unit remained at Butaritari and life became somewhat routine except for an occasional fly-over by a Japanese observation plane.

One warm day my gun crew and I were relaxing on a quiet beach enjoying a few bottles of captured Japanese beer, when a Navy cruiser approached the island and a small launch came ashore by us. There were two sailors aboard and a large dog that bounded up and down the beach and in and out of the surf and seemed happy to be on firm ground again. The sailors explained that they

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were instructed to find a new home for the dog as it was against regulations to keep the dog on the ship. I thought the dog would be a welcome addition to our outfit, and after considerable negotiations, we swapped ten bottles of captured beer for "Kiska," the name that had been given to the dog by the crew of the ship.

Before the sailors left, I wanted to know more about the dog, and a very interesting story unfolded. In June, 1942, a Japanese task force captured the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska. A year later, U.S. forces recaptured Attu after a bitter 18-day battle. In August, 1943, landings were made at Kiska, only to discover it had been abandoned by the Japanese, who left much of their equipment and a few of their military dogs behind. One of the dogs was captured by the landing party and given to the crew of a cruiser as a trophy. The dog was promptly named "Kiska" and was hostile for a long time, but gradually accepted his fate as a "prisoner of war" and became the ship mascot. When a new commanding officer was assigned to the cruiser, he ordered the crew to get rid of the animal at the next inhabited island. It was now February, 1944, and that island happened to Butaritari.

