

FORTITUDINE

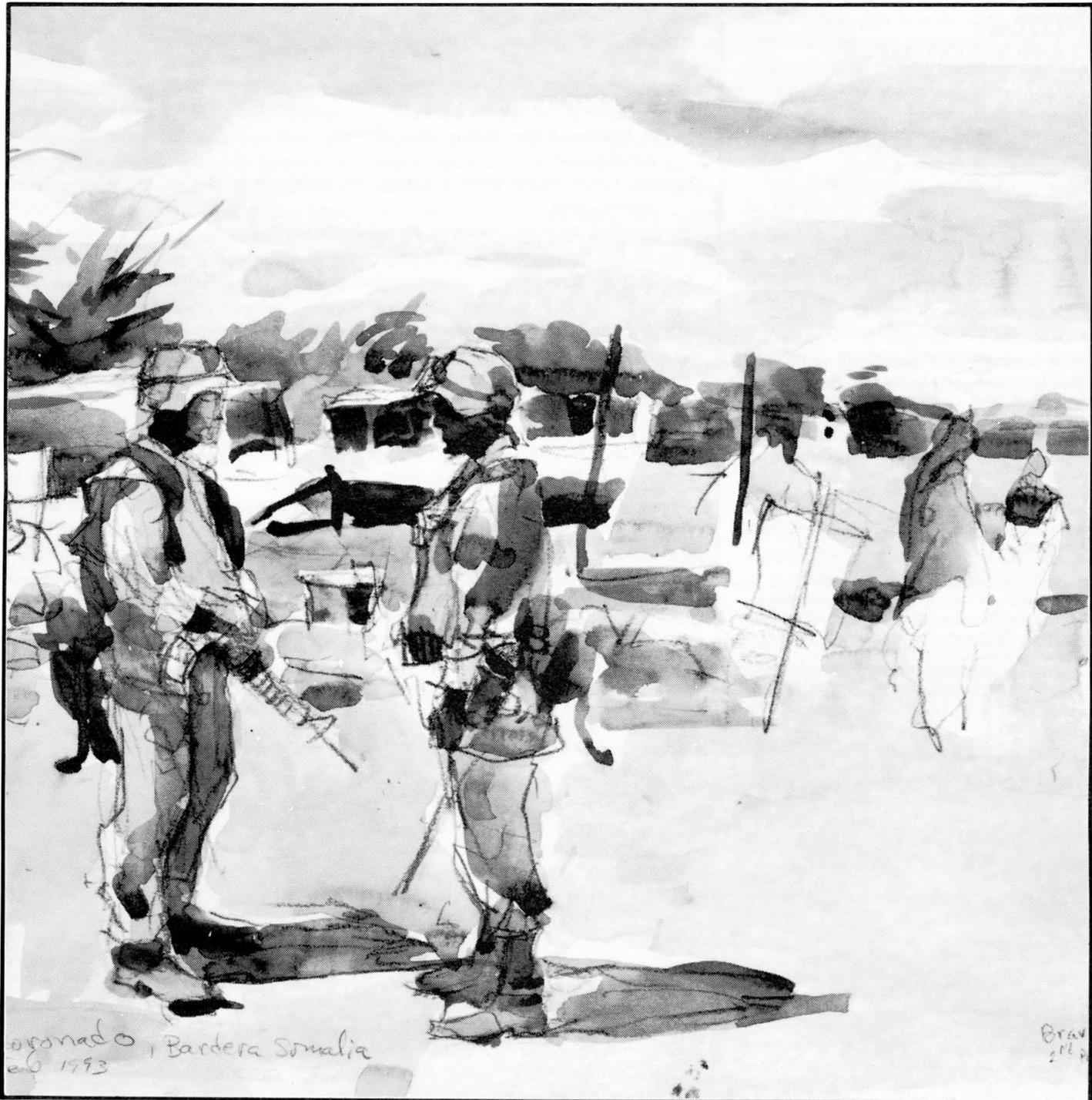
BULLETIN OF THE MARINE CORPS HISTORICAL PROGRAM

HISTORICAL BULLETIN VOLUME XXII

WINTER 1992-1993

NUMBER 3

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TO ANOTHER MARINE



STORIED MARINE ARTILLERYMAN RECALLED IN FORT SILL DETACHMENT BUILDING NAMING . . . RELIVING AFTER 25 YEARS THE VIETNAM WAR'S BRUTAL 'BATTLE FOR HUE' . . . ON THE ROAD IN SOMALIA, MARINE HISTORIANS, ARTISTS RECORD THE CORPS' HUMANITARIAN MISSION . . . FLIGHT LINES: THOMAS-MORSE S.4 SCOUT TRAINER

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Mr. Robert E. Struder
Senior Editor/Editor, Fortitudine

FORTITUDINE

Motto of the United States Marine Corps in the 1812 era.

Historical Bulletin Volume XXII

Winter 1991-1992

No. 3

This quarterly bulletin of the Marine Corps historical program is published for Marines, at the rate of one copy for every nine on active duty, to provide education and training in the uses of military and Marine Corps history. Other interested readers may purchase single copies or one-year subscriptions (four issues) from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

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THE COVER

Marines of 2d Platoon, Bravo Company, 3d Assault Amphibian Battalion, were taking part in Operation Coronado in Bardera, Somalia, on 10 February when they were sketched in pencil and watercolor by Col Peter M. Gish, USMCR, a senior member of the Marine Corps Combat Art Program. Col Gish and fellow artist LtCol Donna J. Neary, USMCR, were the first two combat artists to be dispatched to record the Marine presence in Somalia. In addition to the art program, operations of the Combined Joint Task Force Somalia were covered by some innovative programs developed by military historians, with Marine historians of Mobilization Training Unit (History) DC-7 taking the lead. A number of articles, and some of the interesting artwork brought back from the humanitarian relief program in the East African nation, appears beginning on page 12. Another History and Museums Division program, Commemorative Naming, is highlighted by discussion of the dedication of Wilburt S. 'Bigfoot' Brown Hall at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, by BGen Simmons, beginning on page 3.

Fortitudine is produced in the Editing and Design Section of the History and Museums Division. The text for *Fortitudine* is set in 10-point and 8-point Garamond typeface. Headlines are in 18-point or 24-point Garamond. The bulletin is printed on 70-pound, matte-coated paper by offset lithography.

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.



BGen Simmons

Fond Memories of 'Bigfoot' Brown

ONE OF THE Commemorative Naming Program actions this past year was the naming of the Marine Corps Detachment Headquarters at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in honor of MajGen Wilburt S. "Bigfoot" Brown. Marines have been going to Fort Sill for gunnery instruction since at least the First World War. Gen Brown had been one of them; he had been there both as a student and as an instructor. Artillerymen are a brotherhood of their own and the rapport between the Army and the Marines at Fort Sill has always been superb. All things considered, it was almost inevitable that the Marine Corps Detachment headquarters facility, a one-story building, be named for Bigfoot Brown, but credit for pursuing the naming action must go to the detachment commander, Col Philip E. Hughes.

The date of the dedication was set for 27 August. Gen Brown's widow, Mrs. Martha Stennis Brown, asked me to make the dedicatory remarks and that pleased me

very much. Bigfoot Brown had been my regimental commander in Korea and at several other times we had served in the same places and I admired him greatly.

MajGen Fred F. Marty, USA, the commander at Fort Sill, was a splendid host and turned out a fine ceremony for the occasion. Fort Sill is a beautiful post in the Southwestern style and filled with history. It had been a cool, wet summer. Everything was unexpectedly green and the day was almost chilly. The post band was there and so was the distinctive showpiece of Fort Sill ceremonies, the half-section of horse-drawn artillery.

WHEN MY TURN TO speak came, I could almost see my old regimental commander sitting there in the front row, legs crossed so that a large foot with a large shoe could be seen moving up and down impatiently. In my mind's eye, he was wearing a loose set of green herringbone utilities stained with the dust of the

Korean hills. His helmet, chin strap unfastened, was worn at a jaunty angle so as to accommodate his ear to the handset of a field radio. Like most artillerymen he was a bit deaf. As I stammered through my introductory remarks I could hear him saying:

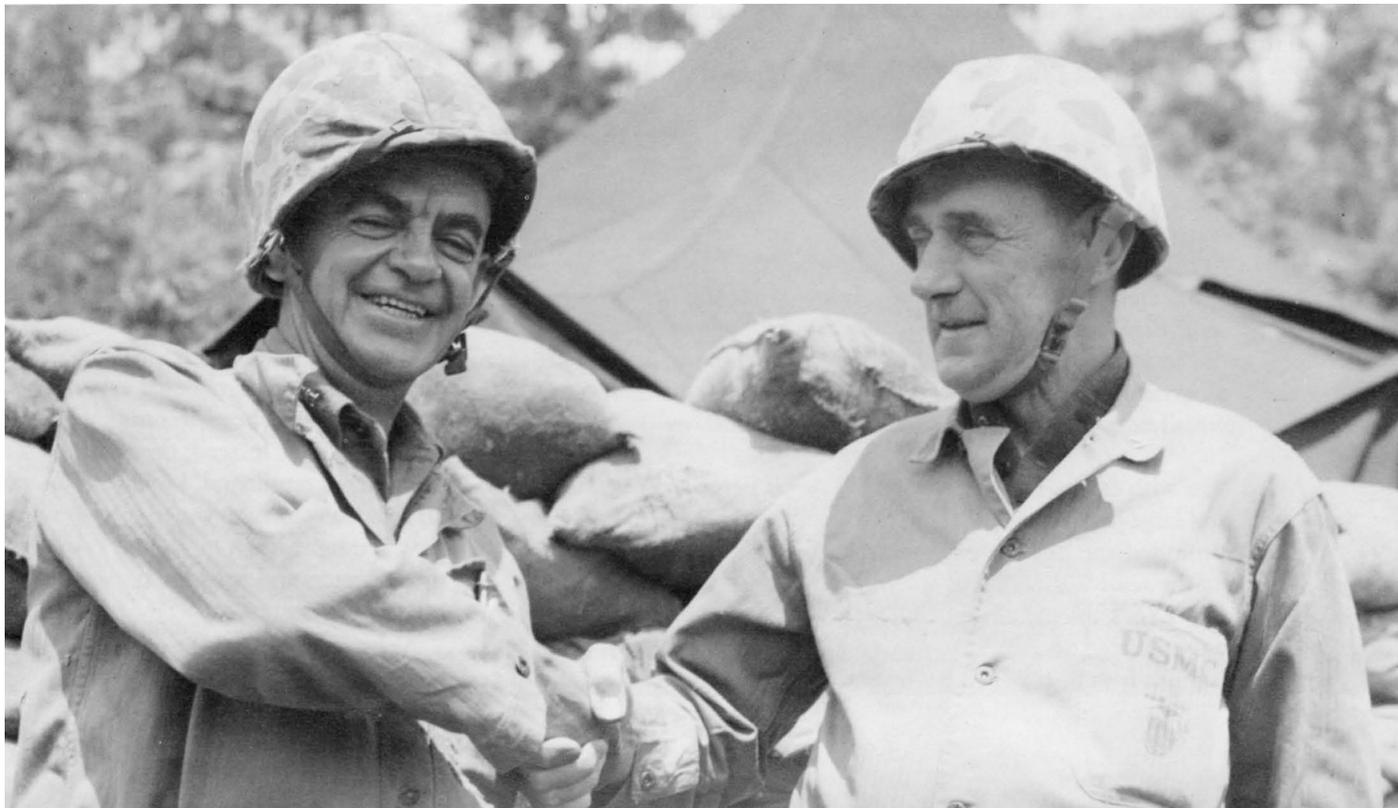
"Never mind the false humility, Simmons. Get to the point."

And the point was that we were there to dedicate the headquarters building in the name of one of the Marine Corps' finest and most beloved artillerymen.

After getting through the amenities I told an artillery story that involved both the Army and Marines, something that occurred on Okinawa near the end of the Second World War. Col Brown was then the commanding officer of the 11th Marines, the artillery regiment of the 1st Marine Division. For those in the audience who were not artillerymen, I explained that there is a technique that artillerymen like to use to demonstrate their virtuosity called a

Col Wilburt S. "Bigfoot" Brown, right, is congratulated upon taking command of the 1st Marines in Korea by outgoing commander Col Francis M. McAlister. Following the 25 May 1951

picture-taking, Col Brown told battalion commanders that he had aspired for years to the command of a Marine infantry regiment in combat and would issue his first order as such: "Retreat."



“TOT” or “time-on-target.” It is a shoot so planned that all shells impact at the same time regardless of the caliber or range of the guns from which they come.

I repeated the story as Gen Brown told it to us and as we taped it some 25 years ago:

“ONE NIGHT, JUST when the battle was nearly over,” Gen Brown recalled, “I asked the 96th Division about a TOT on a town in the south of Okinawa. The 96th went at it with a happy heart, and they got support from the 77th Division artillery . . . I got some help [too] from the 6th [Marine] Division and we used the Corps artillery of the III Phib-Corps and the Corps artillery of the XXIV Corps. So we ended up with a 22-battalion TOT”

“[A] time-on-target is always a pretty thing to watch The man that’s shooting says ‘Time on target—90 seconds after my mark. Stand by. Mark.’ Then everyone sings this chorus over their loudspeakers. Then, almost at once, the guns in the rear with the longest flight go bo-o-om! And then the guns up a little closer speak, and the other guns come in—boom—boom—boom—boom. And then the 105s and the 75s come in—boom—boom—boom—boom—boom. And God Almighty, this place is coming down. We had 22 battalions in this shoot, but I hadn’t told my division general or the Army general or any division general. . . .”

“If I had only been smart enough to do that, the Army commander would have been down there to have his picture taken. I could have probably become the Commandant of the [Marine] Corps. But instead, everyone in the island was wakened out of a sound sleep at 2230 when all this tremendous hassle started and they thought it was a Japanese counterattack. So instead of getting credit out of it, I caught hell from all sides.”

That was typical of Bigfoot Brown: doing the outrageous, endearing himself to his troops, telling a great story, and catching hell, if not from all sides, at least from the top.

He was a big man with craggy features and large hands and large feet. In appearance he always reminded me of a more roughcut version of the actor Walter Pidgeon. He also had an actor’s voice, a rumbling sort of voice that started deep in his chest, and he could use it well. It was in



Col Brown, second from left, receives the Legion of Merit from MajGen DeWitt Peck at 1st Marine Division Headquarters, Tientsin. The award cited Brown’s service as 11th Marines commander on Okinawa.

Nicaragua that he received the nickname “Bigfoot” and here is how he remembered the circumstances:

“Well, I do have this great big foot. It’s a size 14F With all the patrols I was doing my shoes all wore out The Army was supposed to have some large sizes in Panama. So I asked the quartermaster to get me some of those.”

THIS WAS IN 1927 and Lt Brown was then up in the mountains of northwestern Nicaragua at San Albino Mines near Jicaro. The Marine Corps was experimenting with aerial resupply. A trimotor Fokker would take the supplies from Managua to Ocotal and from Ocotal the remote hill stations would get emergency resupply dropped from two-place biplane Vought Corsair fighter-bombers. However, in this case, the pilot of the Fokker decided to make the drop himself.

As Gen Brown remembered it:

“Here was this big package of shoes for me Nothing would suit [Sid] Williamson then but that he should take

them up to the hill station and drop them himself He stuck a note to me on it and it said, ‘The Corsair couldn’t get off the ground with this load, so I had to risk my life to bring this up to you. Regards, Sid.’ ”

The story got touched up a bit as time went on and it emerged that the plane required two trips to deliver the shoes. This version of the story would send Gen Brown into a mock rage.

“It is a canard,” he would say, “It is not true that two trips were made. That Fokker was perfectly capable of carrying both shoes in one load.”

I first saw Gen Brown in October 1945, after the war’s end, and the place was the British Club at the end of Race Course Road in Tientsin. This imposing figure of a colonel was on the dance floor sweeping along his partner in a most impressive way. I guessed that he must be Col Brown, commander of the 11th Marines, and someone told me that, yes, I was right, this was the legendary Bigfoot Brown. I was not introduced that afternoon. In 1945 Marine colonels were not apt to have much to say in a social way to Marine captains.

IN CHINA THAT following summer something happened that came to be known as the An Ping Incident. Col Brown had his regimental headquarters in the old French arsenal outside of Tientsin. One of his missions was to send a truck convoy twice a week from Tientsin to Peking. On the 29th of July 1946, one of these convoys was attacked at a place called An Ping, about half-way between Tientsin and Peking. The second lieutenant commanding the patrol and several other Marines were killed. As soon as word of the ambush reached Brown he sent a motorized column, including several pieces of artillery, to the rescue.

Gen Brown later told me what followed in approximately these words:

“I was summoned to division headquarters and I went modestly expecting to learn that I had been recommended for the Navy Cross. Instead, they handed me this letter of reprimand. I told [the General] that if my mission was to spread sweetness and light, then he should take away my howitzers and issue me baskets full of rose petals.”

As he remembered the outcome of the incident:

“There was a tremendous outcry that followed this, and it was alleged that the Marines had taken the offensive against the Commies. Of course, when one puts 50 men against a battalion of a couple of hundred, I mean even the 11th Marines doesn’t start a fight under those circumstances. The President of the United States took it up and when the smoke all cleared away, I had a letter of admonition from [the Commanding General, Marine Forces, China] and it was decided that I had better be getting out of China.”

He reported in at Headquarters Marine Corps in Washington, and found that Headquarters, still upset over the fight at An Ping, was pondering his next assignment. The Air University, then just forming at Montgomery, Alabama, had asked for a Marine Corps instructor. It seemed to be an assignment in which Brown could do relatively little harm, so he was sent there in November 1946.

HE TAUGHT amphibious tactics, including coordination of artillery with naval gunfire and air support. He also had a prize lecture on the organization of the Navy. He would tell the class that, upon being assigned this latter subject, he had been “amazed to hear that the Navy had an organization.”

He had “always thought that it was like the Marine Corps.” The Marines, he believed, “stayed in a continual state of disorganization so they could be ready for anything.”

Behind the wit and clowning there was a carefully prepared, finely tuned, constantly revised lecture. In a serious moment, he once told me that for every hour on the platform, whatever the school, he would spend 40 hours in preparation.

This is a man who enlisted in the Marine Corps at Boston in the spring of 1918. Born in December 1900 and underage at 17, he managed an adjustment to his birth certificate to show his birth year as 1899 vice 1900. After recruit training at Parris Island he went as a private to France, where he joined the 20th Company, 5th Marines, in time for the St. Mihiel and Champagne offensives. In the latter, during the attack against Blanc Mont, he was wounded on 4 October. That took him out of action for the remainder of the war.

In the summer of 1920 he was discharged, as a sergeant, from the Marine Corps to take an appointment to the Naval

Academy. His stay at Annapolis was not a complete success. During the summer cruise in 1922 he had a problem with the shore patrol in Lisbon and again in Martinique.

As he put it: “. . . the Academy authorities then decided to drop me from the rolls for inaptitude, which was kind of them at that.”

He left the Academy in September, re-enlisted in the Corps, and in 1925 was commissioned a second lieutenant from the ranks. After finishing the Officers Basic School, he was assigned to his old regiment, the 5th Marines, in time to help guard the mails during an outbreak of train robberies. There were two tours in Nicaragua and several engagements against the Sandinistas, for one of which he received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

He returned from Nicaragua in 1929, went to Sea School at San Diego, and was assigned as the junior officer to the Marine Detachment of the new aircraft carrier, USS *Saratoga*. Barracks duty in Mare Island, California, and on Guam followed.

In 1935 he was assigned to the Base Defense Weapons Course at Quantico and his formal education as an artillery officer began. On graduation he was given command of an artillery battery of the 1st Marine Brigade.

Then in 1937 he was transferred to San Diego and given command of a 155mm gun battery in the 2d Marine Brigade. The

155mm of the time was the “G.P.F.,” a long-barreled French gun left over from the First World War: the “Grande Puissance Filloux” as he used to like to roll off his tongue.

IN 1939, now a captain, he went on board the USS *Pennsylvania* as the Marine Detachment commander. In those days of the old battlewagons, the Marines manned the secondary batteries of 5-inch guns.

In the summer of 1941, with the war clouds thickening, he returned to San Diego as a major to take command of the 4th Battalion, 10th Marines, of the new 2d Marine Division.

In March 1942, after the war had begun, he went off to serve as executive officer of the 8th Defense Battalion, which was sent to defend Wallis Island, west of Samoa.

He was returned to the United States as a lieutenant colonel in November 1942 with a persistent tropical skin disease. This caused his hospitalization until February 1943, when he was ordered to Fort Sill to attend the Advanced Artillery School. After completing the school he was detailed to the Troop Training Unit then forming at the Amphibious Base, Coronado, California. Serving as a team leader, he helped train four Army divisions and two Marine divisions in amphibious tactics and techniques.

While at Camp White, Oregon, training the 96th Infantry Division, he received his promotion to colonel. He celebrated

At the Fort Sill dedication ceremonies, the General's widow, Mrs. Martha Stennis Brown, accepts roses and other remembrances from a soldier in vintage uniform. The post joined in the honors by sending its ceremonial half-section of horse-drawn artillery.





Marine historian BGen Edwin H. Simmons addresses the audience at the dedication of Wilbur S. "Bigfoot" Brown Hall at Fort Sill. Gen Simmons drew on personal memories of Gen Brown, as well as information found in Brown's oral history interview.

his promotion with a wetting-down party held in a bedroom of a hotel in nearby Medford. He climbed up onto the bed, stooping to accommodate his height to the ceiling, and demanded of the well-wishers crammed into the room that he be treated with more respect by his subordinates, Marine and Army alike.

"Now that I am a colonel," he announced, "No more of this 'Bigfoot' nonsense. From here on I expect to be addressed in the British manner; that is, as Colonel Wilbur Scott-hyphen-Browne with an 'e' on the end."

DESPITE THIS DEMAND, the hyphenated Scott-Browne with an "e" on the end never caught on, and he continued to be Bigfoot Brown.

In October 1944 he went to Guadalcanal to take command of the 15th Marines, the artillery regiment of the 6th Marine Division, but found that the 15th Marines already had a commanding officer. After a few days of impasse, he was sent to the 1st Marine Division in the nearby Russell Islands to take command of the 11th Marines, in time, as said above, for the Okinawa operation.

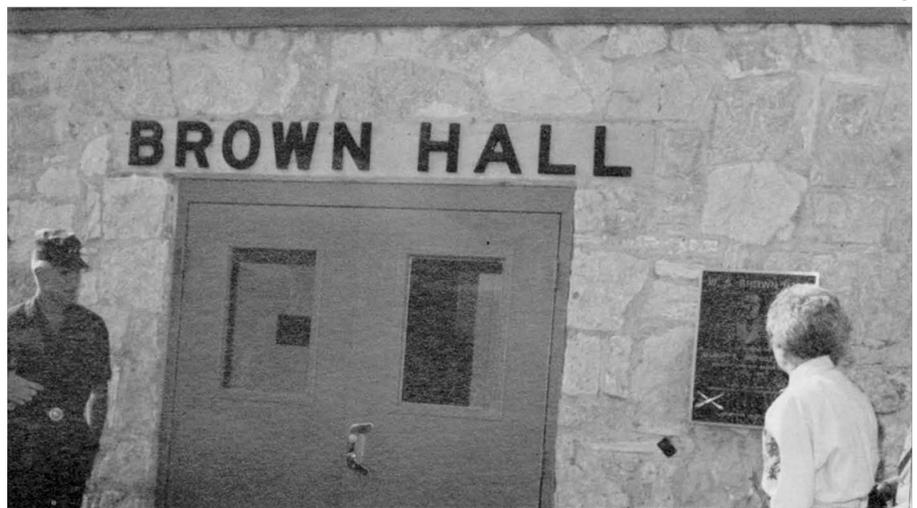
Despite the unannounced TOT on Okinawa and the An Ping Incident in China, and a few more almost equally scandalous episodes, he received a Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for outstanding service at Okinawa and a second such award for service in China. Possibly this was because he managed to fob off some of the blame for certain of his more outlandish escapades on his mythical identical twin brother, Philbert Brown, who seems to have spent most of his imaginary

service in the United States Air Force.

While at the Air University at Maxwell Field, Alabama, then-Col Brown met and married Martha Stennis of Mississippi. The newly married couple left Maxwell Field in 1949 for Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where he took command of the 10th Marines, the artillery regiment of the 2d Marine Division.

He was so serving when he was sent to Korea in April 1951. His departure from Camp Lejeune was somewhat abrupt. The 10th Marines was providing drafts of replacements to the 11th Marines, then in the fight in Korea. By regulation no Marine under 18 years of age could go to Korea. While Col Brown was on Christmas leave, several 17-year-olds slipped through with a draft. The 17-year-olds thought it was a fine idea. but their parents did not. The division commander was

Fort Sill commander MajGen Fred E. Marty, USA, left, accompanies Mrs. Brown to remove bunting from the sign at the post's new Marine Detachment Headquarters, Brown Hall. Gen Brown had been at Fort Sill as both student and instructor of artillery.



determined that the battalion commander concerned be disciplined for the error. Col Brown, as regimental commander, was equally determined that the battalion commander not be disciplined. By the end of March the division commander was convinced that Brown was lacking in loyalty and demanded his immediate relief. Brown's orders to Korea were delivered to him on 31 March along with a bad fitness report. He rebutted the bad fitness report with a masterful statement that ended with this sentence:

"If it is considered disloyal to a leader, for me to speak up against an action of his, which I believe to be unjust, then I will be disloyal to any such leader, military or civilian, until I die."

He arrived in Korea just as the commanding officer of the 1st Marines, an infantry regiment, was wounded and he was given command of that regiment as a temporary thing. Our casualties had been high in that regiment and I, as a major, was briefly the acting commander of the 3d Battalion. It was the time of the Chinese spring offensive and the divisions on our right and left had given way.

THE BATTALION COMMANDERS or their operations officers were called back to the regimental command post to meet the new regimental commander and to get the new operation order.

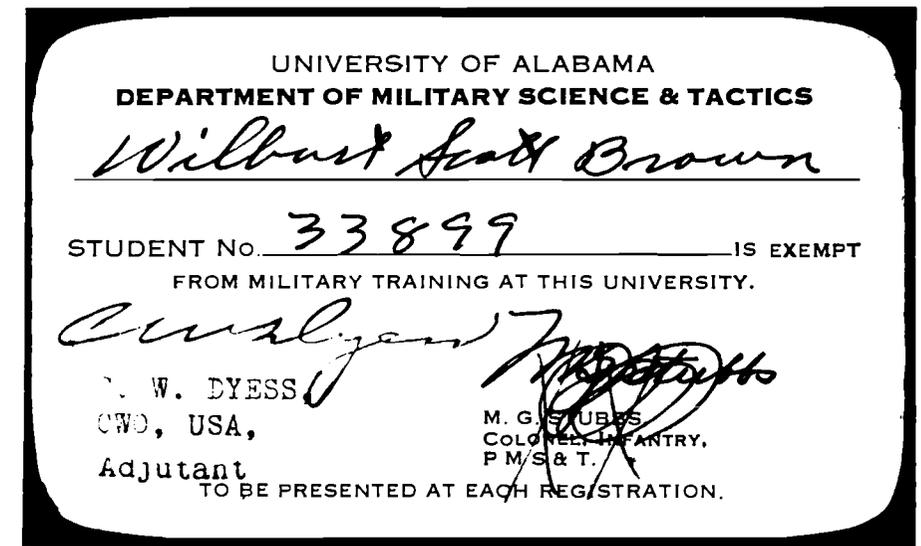
"Gentlemen," said Col Brown, "for 33 years I have aspired to the command of a Marine infantry regiment in combat, and now that I have that command, I will issue my first order: Retreat."

Well, we did not exactly retreat. We restored the line and advanced up to the edge of the Punchbowl. For the two months that he commanded the 1st Marines we were a particularly happy regiment. In July he was relieved by an infantry colonel and given command of the Division rear at Masan, a command he did not particularly like or want and which put him at some distance—literally and figuratively—from the division commander with whom he was having his differences. He was passed over for promotion to brigadier general, but did receive a well-deserved Silver Star for his leadership of the 1st Marines.

HE RETURNED TO the States in November 1951 and was posted to Camp Pendleton as intelligence officer and post inspector of the Marine Corps Base. I was then at Camp Pendleton and I remember fondly that Mrs. Brown crocheted a pair of booties for my first-born child.

In May of 1952 he was transferred to the staff of the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill. He was so serving when a promotion board in, as he put it, a “fit of absent-mindedness,” selected him for promotion to brigadier general. Shortly thereafter he moved back to Camp Pendleton as Commanding General, Force Troops, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

Upon his retirement in 1953 he was advanced to the grade of major general by



University of Alabama compulsory ROTC relented in the case of new student Brown.

reason of his combat decorations, a wonderful old custom, abandoned some 30 years ago for legal reasons.

A well-read and learned man, he had not bothered to pick up any degrees, not even, if you would believe him, a high school diploma. He now entered the University of Alabama. He would soon tell a highly unlikely story of seeking exemption from compulsory ROTC on the grounds that he was an overage, retired Marine major general. I never quite believed that story, but at breakfast before the Fort Sill dedication ceremony, Mrs. Brown presented me with his exemption card.

He zipped through the requirements

for a bachelor's degree and master's degree in history. He became a teaching member of the faculty in 1957. He then went in pursuit of a Ph.D. This he achieved in 1963. His doctoral dissertation treated the British invasion of Louisiana in 1814 as an amphibious operation. It is indisputably the best and most analytic military history of that campaign, which we otherwise remember chiefly for Andrew Jackson's defeat of Sir Edward Pakenham at New Orleans.

GEN BROWN, now Dr. Brown, as a member of the history department of the University of Alabama, was just as beloved on the Tuscaloosa campus, and the subject of just as many stories, as he had been at Quantico, or Pendleton, or Lejeune, or Maxwell Field, or at Fort Sill.

Regrettably, he did not have many years to enjoy this academic pasture. He died, after a long bout with emphysema, in December 1968. His dissertation, slightly reworked, was published posthumously in 1969 by the University of Alabama under the title *The Amphibious Campaign for West Florida and Louisiana, 1814-1815: A Critical Review of Strategy and Tactics at New Orleans*.

But any recollection of Bigfoot Brown should not end on such a morbid note. At Fort Sill I told one more story, a personal one. That morning in Korea, after he had given his retreat order to the 1st Marines, he kindly asked me to stay behind to have lunch with him—lunch being taking a mess kit through the chow line and then sitting on opposite ends of his canvas cot.

As we talked, I thought he might

Marine Facilities' Names Honor Corps' Heroes

*by Robert V. Aquilina
Assistant Head, Reference Section*

It is Marine Corps policy to name facilities in honor of those Marines (and other members of the Naval Service) who have served the Corps with distinction. The Marine Corps Commemorative Naming Program was instituted to oversee this responsibility, and to ensure that names are selected in an equitable and just manner. The program is administered by the Reference Section of the History and Museums Division, in accordance with guidelines promulgated in SECNAVINST 5030.2 and MCO P5750.1G.

To date, approximately 650 facilities have been identified with commemorative names, and more than 450 individuals have been honored (many names are used at more than one facility). Marine commanders who have occasion to name property can submit names of candidates to the History and Museums Division (Code HDH-2), or can request that the Division recommend suitable names for specific facilities.

Since the inception of the Commemorative Naming Program, all naming actions have required, and continue to receive, the personal approval of the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

benefit as a newly arrived colonel from some of things I could tell him as a 29-year-old major who had been with the regiment since the Inchon landing. I began sketching in lightly some lessons learned, when he interrupted me.

"You know, Simmons," he rumbled, "When I was a young lieutenant in Nicaragua I came back to the company base after one of those long patrols and the company commander invited me to have dinner. The company commander fancied himself as a bridge player and after dinner there was a game, the company exec and the machine gun officer

against the captain and me. You know, the captain was not a very good bridge player and after he failed to make his bid, I said, 'If you will permit me, sir, I will show you how you could have made that bid.' Do you know, Simmons, I was back on patrol the next morning."

Suitably chastened, I went back to my battalion. A few weeks later I was slightly wounded. Col Brown came to see me, to assure himself that I was not seriously hurt.

"A pitcher that goes to the well too often," he said. "gets broken. You've been to the well often enough." He then went to the division commander to get a set of

special orders to send me home.

As I told that story to Mrs. Brown and the audience at Fort Sill, I could still see my regimental commander sitting there in front of me, just as I described earlier. As he was known to do in the course of an over-long critique of a field problem, he had taken off his shoe and was massaging that large size-14F foot. By so doing he would shift the focus of attention from the speaker to himself. In my imagination, I could hear him saying:

"Simmons, you have talked long enough. Sit down."

And so I did.

□1775□

Histories Follow Marine Units in Iceland, the Caribbean

by Benis M. Frank
Chief Historian

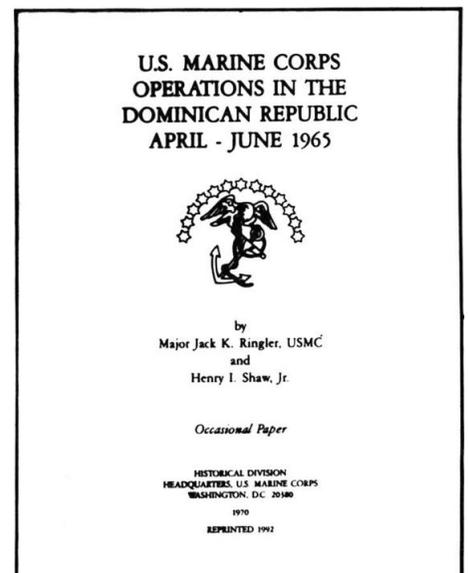
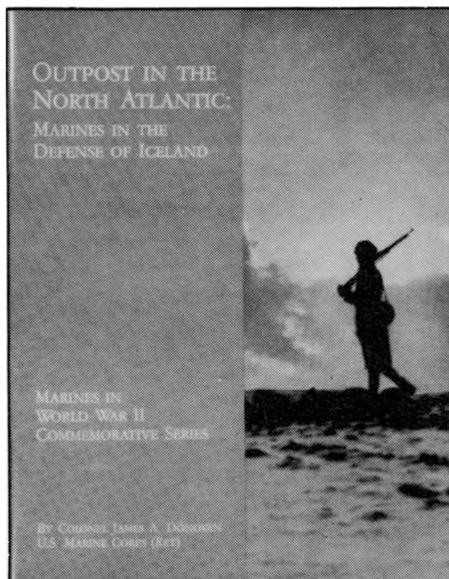
TWO NEW TITLES have been added to the list of History and Museums Division publications. The first is an occasional paper, *U.S. Marine Corps Operations in the Dominican Republic, April-June 1965*, by Maj Jack K. Ringler, USMC, and former Chief Historian Henry I. Shaw, Jr. This history originated in the request of then-Commandant Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., that an account of the deployment of Marines to the Dominican Republic be compiled shortly after the event, when the command diaries of the units involved became available. These documents were on hand in the summer of 1965, when a chronology was prepared using the diaries, message traffic, and other material, most all of which was still

classified. The demands of historical reporting and writing about Marine Corps operations in Vietnam caused the incomplete narrative of this history to be put aside until 1969, when Mr. Shaw was available to finish it.

THE SECOND NEW publication is *Outpost in the North Atlantic: Marines in the Defense of Iceland*, written by Col James A. Donovan, Jr., USMC (Ret), who, as a second lieutenant, was a member of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) when it was deployed to Iceland in mid-1941 to join British forces to defend that country from a potential Nazi takeover. In *Outpost in the North Atlantic*, Col Donovan provides a good picture of life in a pre-World War II Marine infantry battalion as it prepared for war, and then deployment to an unknown destination. He tells of the brigade's eight-month stay on Iceland under conditions for which the Marines were not fully prepared, either in dress or equipment. He gives a good picture of the day-to-day conditions of the Marines on Iceland, how they trained in an unfamiliar environment, and how they were able to keep busy in the long, dark days of winter. Perhaps the highlight of this deployment was the day that Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill reviewed the Allied garrison.

As other pamphlets in the World War II 50th anniversary commemorative series, *Outpost in the North Atlantic: Marines in the Defense of Iceland* is available to Ma-

rines and historians by sending \$1.50 for postage and handling to the Marine Corps Historical Foundation, P.O. Box 240, Quantico, Virginia 22134. Veterans' organizations can obtain limited numbers of copies by writing to the Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Building 58, 901 M Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20374-5040. Other interested individuals should mail \$3.75 to the Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15250. A finite number of copies of *U.S. Marine Corps Operations in the Dominican Republic, April-June 1965* is available to institutional addressees and can be obtained by writing to the Center at the above address. □1775□



Marines Mark 25th Anniversary of Pivotal Battle for Hue

by Dr. Jack Shulimson
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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO this winter, U.S. Marines turned back the North Vietnamese massive onslaught on the city of Hue, the former Imperial capital of Vietnam.

On 30-31 January 1968, during the Vietnamese lunar New Year, the Communists mounted a surprise offensive throughout all of South Vietnam. Most of these attacks were by local Viet Cong units. There was one place, however, where the Communists committed first-line North Vietnamese units and that was in the one-month struggle for Hue. It is probable that in the battle for Hue the North Vietnamese attempted to achieve, with some prospect of success, a decisive victory that would result in the loss of the two northern provinces of South Vietnam to the Communists.

At the beginning of 1968, nearly three years after the commitment of large American combat forces, the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), under Army Gen William C. Westmoreland, had intelligence of a massing of enemy divisions in the northern border region, especially in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing the two Vietnams and in Laos near the isolated U.S. Marine base at Khe Sanh. Westmoreland prepared to reinforce the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), under Marine LtGen Robert E. Cushman, in the five northern provinces in South Vietnam.

III MAF in January 1968 numbered more than 100,000 Marines, sailors, and soldiers, including two Marine and one Army infantry divisions. In mid-January, Westmoreland rushed yet another Army division, the elite 1st Air Cavalry Division, north. Worried about the Marine defenses at Khe Sanh and lacking confidence in the ability of the Marine commanders to control the situation, Westmoreland planned to establish a temporary northern forward headquarters under his deputy, Army Gen Creighton Abrams. Before he could implement this plan, the enemy launched his Tet offensive—everywhere but at Khe Sanh.

AS THE FORMER imperial capital, Hue was for many Vietnamese the cultural center of the country. It emitted a sense

both of its colonial and its imperial past. It was, in effect, two cities. North of the Perfume River lay the Hue of the Emperors with its ancient Citadel. South of the river was the modern city. The *Cercle-Sportif* with its veranda overlooking the river evoked the former French colonial administration.

The South Vietnamese had dismissed any notion that the enemy had the “capability” to launch a division-size attack against the city. Unknown to the allies, two enemy regiments, the 6th and 4th North Vietnamese Armies (NVA) were on the move. On 31 January, at 0223, a signal flare lit up the night sky above Hue. A four-man North Vietnamese sapper team opened the Western gate of the Citadel to the lead battalions of the 6th NVA. By daylight, most of the Citadel was in the hands of the NVA. At the Mang Ca 1st Army of Vietnam (ARVN) Division compound, an ad hoc 200-man defensive force managed to stave off the enemy assaults.

Across the river in southern Hue, much the same situation existed. The NVA maintained a virtual siege of the MACV

advisory compound. While the 4th NVA attack in the new city lacked the cohesion and timing of those in the Citadel, the NVA had control of most of southern Hue.

The first U.S. Marines to bolster the South Vietnamese in the city were from the newly formed Task Force X-Ray, a new command under BGen Foster C. LaHue, at Phu Bai, about eight miles south of Hue. LaHue had barely enough time to become acquainted with his new sector, let alone the fast-developing Hue situation. He later wrote: “Initial deployment of forces was made with limited information.”

WITH THIS “limited information,” Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines received orders to relieve Hue. Although reinforced by four Marine tanks, the Marine company was caught in a murderous crossfire after crossing the An Cuu Bridge into the city. Among the casualties was the company commander.

The Marines reinforced the embattled company with the command group of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (LtCol Marcus

On 3 February 1968, aided by tanks in street fighting, Marines clear buildings at the University of Hue. LtCol Cheatham established a command post at the university.



J. Gravel) and Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. Gravel's relief column reached Company A in the early afternoon. By this time, the enemy attackers had pulled back their forces. BGen LaHue remembered that reports came in that the 1st ARVN Division was "in trouble" and "we were ordered to go across the river to relieve some of the pressure."

Leaving Company A behind to secure the MACV compound, LtCol Gravel took Company G and attempted to cross the main bridge over the Perfume River. Two infantry platoons successfully made their way over, but then immediately came under machine gun fire. Gravel remembered, "we were no match for what was going on . . . I decided to withdraw."

This was easier said than done. The enemy was well dug-in and "firing from virtually every building." Company G lost nearly a third of its men, either wounded or killed, "going across that one bridge and then getting back across that bridge."

THE AMERICAN COMMAND still had little realization of the situation in Hue. In Saigon, Gen Westmoreland cabled Washington, the "Enemy has approximately three companies in the Hue Citadel and Marines have sent a battalion into the area to clear them out."

Gen LaHue soon realized the enemy strength in Hue was much greater than he had originally estimated. Shortly after noon, on 1 February, he called in Col Stanley S. Hughes of the 1st Marines and gave him tactical control of the forces in the southern city. Hughes reinforced the two Marine companies in Hue with Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines.

In southern Hue, on 2 February, the Marines made some minor headway and Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines reinforced the Marines in the city. The NVA, however, continued to block any advance to the west towards the Province headquarters building.

At Phu Bai, Col Hughes prepared to bring his headquarters and that of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, under LtCol Ernest C. Cheatham, into Hue. On the morning of the 3d, Hughes established his command post in the MACV compound and held a hurried conference with his two battalion commanders. While LtCol Cheatham took control of his three companies already in the city, Gravel retained command of his Company A.

Establishing his command post at the University, LtCol Cheatham, like Gravel before him, made no headway against the enemy. The following morning, 4 February, Col Hughes decided to place the 1st Battalion on LtCol Cheatham's exposed flank and continue the push against the enemy defensive positions.

On the morning of the 4th, Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines joined LtCol Gravel's command. That night, however, North Vietnamese sappers blew the An Cuu bridge, effectively closing the land route into the city. This left the Marine command only two alternatives to resupply the Hue forces—river traffic and helicopters.

One of the immediate problems was the inadequacy of the Marine maps. As the commander of Company G observed, "You have to raid the local Texaco station to get your street map," which located the principal buildings and prominent tourist attractions in Hue.

WITH LITTLE ROOM to outflank the enemy, the battalion had to take each block and each building "one at a time." According to Cheatham, "we had to pick a point and attempt to break that one strong point . . ." After a time, Cheatham and his officers noted that the enemy "defended on every other street . . ." The battalion would move quickly and then hit a defensive position.

On the morning of 5 February, both Marine battalions resumed the attack in a southwesterly direction toward the city hospital and provincial headquarters. On the right flank, Company H advanced along the river front. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines secured the left flank. LtCol Gravel remembered, "The going was slow . . . We fought for two days over one building."

Using tear gas, Company H, on the afternoon of 6 February, finally overwhelmed the NVA defenders in the provincial headquarters. The capture of the provincial headquarters was more than symbolic. The building apparently had served as the command post for the *4th NVA Regiment*. Once the headquarters fell to the Marines much of the enemy organized resistance in southern Hue collapsed. Gravel recalled "He [the NVA] seemed to lose his stomach for the fight. . . . once we started rolling . . . the main force sort of evaporated . . . and left some

local force—rinky dinks When his defense crumbled, it crumbled."

BY 10 FEBRUARY, despite some occasional resistance, the Marines were in control south of the Perfume River. With the NVA still holding fast in the Citadel, Hue was now indeed two cities. North Vietnamese sappers had blown the main bridge across the river, literally dividing the city in half.

In clearing the modern city, the Marines took a heavy toll of the enemy, but at a high cost to themselves. The Americans had accounted for more than 1,000 enemy dead and took six prisoners. Marine casualties included 38 dead and more than 320 wounded. A Marine from 2d Battalion, 5th Marines remarked, "The stink—you had to load up so many wounded, the blood would dry on your hands. In two or three days you would smell like death itself."

While the Marines cleared the new city, a South Vietnamese offensive in the Citadel had faltered. By 8 February, BGen Ngo Quang Truong, the 1st Division commander, had inside the Citadel four airborne battalions and the 3d ARVN Regiment, which were able to hold their own.

About 10 miles to the west of Hue, the U.S. Army's 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division was having about as little luck as the ARVN forces in the Citadel. Having run into well entrenched enemy forces, the 3d Brigade did not have the wherewithal to push the NVA out. During this period, the North Vietnamese command maintained its "own support area outside the western wall [of the Citadel]"

IN THE INTERIM, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff sent reinforcements from Saigon to Phu Bai, the lead elements of a Vietnamese Marine Task Force. Gen Truong proposed to have the South Vietnamese Marines replace the battered Vietnamese airborne battalions in the Citadel. Although one company entered the Citadel on the 10th, the Vietnamese Marine commander refused to insert any more troops until the rest of his command arrived from Saigon.

Gen Truong also asked for a U.S. Marine battalion. On 11-12 February, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, under Maj Robert H. Thompson, entered the Citadel to take over the southeastern sector. As did the