

**John M. Harbison**  
**0389718 – Infantry**

**My commitment to the military and to World War II in the Pacific and  
Special Assignments by the War Department in Washington D.C.**

**1935-1937**     **John Tarlton Junior College (a branch of Texas A&M College) ROTC**  
Infantry Drill Sergeant

**1937-1940**     ROTC **Texas A&M**. Received Second LT commission upon graduation.  
Infantry. May 30, 1940

**December 6, 1941** Married Mildred Irene Smith in Lovington, NM the day before Pearl  
Harbor

**March 19, 1942**     Called into active service to report to Fort Benning, GR Rifle and  
Heavy Weapons Course 32.

**July 14, 1942**     Ordered to report to 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Camp Adair near Albany,  
Oregon where Joe Bob was born in October.

**December 21, 1942** Assigned to E Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 382 Infantry as Company  
Commander

**July 23, 1944**     Sailed out through the Golden Gates, ended up at Schofield  
Barracks on Oahu, Hawaii

**August 21, 1944**     Loading LST to hit “Yap Island”. Orders changed in route to hit  
Leyte Philippines October 20.

**October 20 – 25, 1944**     E Company advanced toward Tabon-Tabon through swamp  
and rice fields. We disposed of most of our equipment to prevent sinking – I landed on  
an amphibious tank that bogged down almost immediately. The natives furnished water  
buffalos and the mortar section loaded one of them down with mortar rounds. The last I  
saw of the water buffalo was his nose sticking above the muck. Resistance was light  
snipers in coconut trees and huts. I gave orders to my E CO to burn the huts. We  
continued to wade through the swamp toward Tabon-Tabon. The second night we dug in  
on a little higher ground. It was raining and very dark and the Japs herded a bunch of  
water buffalo through our perimeter and we killed them with rifles and grenades. One  
man got out of his fox hole and he was killed. I was so scared that I was ineffective. I  
gave myself a good talking-to and decided that “what is to be will be” and did not  
experience that kind of fright again. I also gave orders to discontinue using grenades  
inside the perimeter. The first platoon crossed the small river at Tabon-Tabon just before  
dark on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October. We received heavy fire from the Japs who were dug in under

every hut in Tabon-Tabon. We had a couple of men that were wounded and were recovered after dark and moved back across the river to the aid station. The rest of the platoon spent the night in E Company perimeter. We got orders to attack at dawn the next morning. F and G companies were to lead the attack and E Co was to follow in reserve. At dawn I looked up and Col. Dill, our regimental commander, was on the bridge waving his pistol to attack. Tabon-Tabon had received a pounding all night from our artillery and the Japs had moved out to a new position about 300 yards north which they had prepared with mouse holes earlier anticipating this type of attack. F and G Company lead by Col Sterner were pinned down by heavy fire so Sterner sent Autry back to me with orders to commit my company on the right flank. I lead a platoon around the right flank and ran into the middle of the Japs. They were not well disciplined troops because several started committing suicide by holding grenades under their chins. Col Dill sent a small tank and an open top tank to me and after they opened up on machine guns to our front the Japs became ineffective for awhile. The open top tank was receiving so much threat of hand grenades and close fire that he had to move out. I was directing the small tank when a Jap came walking toward it with two sticks of dynamite on 1" X 2' board to blow the tracks off the tank. Someone shot him. About that time the small tank was receiving so much fire he decided to pull out. I was directing his fire from his phone on the back of his tank and had to drop it. He ran over it and pulled the wires loose. Sgt Schaffer threw me his phone and I stood behind the tank and spliced the phone wires together while the Japs were firing on the tank. I told him where Sterner was and to fire on anything that moved on his left. He stayed with us until about dark. He left out and I ordered what was left of E Co into our perimeter for the night. Well after dark the Japs made a counter attack without success. We lost about 25 killed and wounded. Lt. Bush, 4<sup>th</sup> platoon leader, was killed while setting up a light machine gun about 8 feet from me. Lt. Runick platoon leader 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon stepped across a mouse hole and a Jap threw a grenade up and hit him in the back leaving shrapnel all over his back. When he came by me I said, "Runick don't leave me." He said "I am hit and going to the aid station. I will be back." He spent time in the hospital and returned to the company before shipping out to Okinawa. I received the Silver Star for my part of the battle of Tabon-Tabon. It should have been given to E Company because everyone was busy and did their part. The Japs abandoned Tabon-Tabon and we moved out the next morning to Killing.

E Company arrived in Killing about 12:00 and started digging in for a rest. About 1:00 pm a messenger came to me and said I was to report to the BNHQ. Which I did. Sterner said, "You are ordered to move out to Patok." I said, "I do not know how to get to Patok." An 18 year old boy who was a Leyte Guerrilla said "I will guide you. Patok was my home." His name was Antonio Ordaver. We moved out at 2 pm. A Jap bomber flew over 500 yards south of us with a P-38 American plane on his tail. He had to dump his bomb to gain speed. At the same time two Jap Zero planes were chasing one of our small artillery observer planes east of us. They did not strafe us. The P-38 took care of them. We advanced toward Patok until we reached a river at 5:00 pm. I called Sterner and told him we were digging in for the night. He said, "You have not taken your objective". Since we were five miles behind the Jap lines I told him I did not want to take my Company across the river not knowing the strength of the Japs at Patok. We advanced to

Patok the next morning, killed two Japs, and set up a defense at the cross road to prevent them from supplying their front lines. We sent many patrols out of Patok. The second day we were in Patok, Antonio came to me and asked if he could go home. He returned to the next day with another young Guerrilla named Francisco. I asked him why he brought him and he said he “lubed” to fight. They were both about 4 feet high and lead most of the patrols out of Patok. They were responsible for much of the success of E Co in the Areaand Mountains to the northwest.

I received orders to join the BN at Dagami around the middle of November. We looked like the Grapes of Wrath: water buffalo loaded with mortars, ponies loaded with light machine guns and ammunition, and soldiers loaded down with everything they could carry. In any event, we made it to our area which had tents and kitchen equipment. We posted our own security. Here again we thought we were going to get some comfortable rest; but, about five days later the Japs made a parachute attack on the Dagami air strip and I received orders to regain the strip. I sent Lt. Parham with the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon. The Japs had shot up the planes and other equipment and retreated to the mountains to the northwest. Lt. Parham shot one who was still in his chute and kept the chute for his girlfriend to make a wedding dress. He got home with it. I received orders to take my company to the mountains after them. My scout Antonio through the “Guerrilla Grapevine” knew where they were. I sent Lt. Barnes and his 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon to attack them and he came back and said “Captain, you won’t believe it, but there is shit all over the hill.” They had eaten American C rations from the air strip. I went forward with him on his right flank. I saw him raise his carbine to shoot then hesitate before he shot. I asked him later why he hesitated and he said the Jap was pulling up his pants. His platoon was advancing through high Koni grass and I with my radio man were protecting the right flank when we came upon a trail that ran across the Koni grass. I saw a Jap enter the trail and dropped him with my rifle. Shortly, I saw another Jap in the trail. I dropped him. I thought I was shooting the same Jap, but when it was over I had accounted for four Japs in a pile. At one point a Jap shot a limb that fell on my shoulder and my radio man said “Are you hit? Are you hit?”

We were still there Christmas Day and they sent us turkey and dressing in the mormite containers. It spoiled before it got there but they also sent us three cans of beer per man. Even though it was hot, it tasted good. My company was ordered to go to the Tacloben airstrip and guard it which was the best assignment we got. I came down with a high fever and was sent to the hospital. I had amebic dysentery and Dungi fever. I stayed in the hospital until a few days before we left for Okinawa. I was transferred to BNHQ as S-3 and planned the loading of equipment and supplies to hit Okinawa on April 1, 1945.

**April 1, 1945** Our BN landed on Okinawa. I was BN S-3 at that time. We waded ashore in shallow water since the tide had gone out. No resistance from the Japs. If so, we would have been wiped out. We advanced inland about 200 yards and dug in for the night. We received a heavy mortar fire that night.

**April 6, 1945** Our BN fought its way forward against heavy resistance from the Japs in caves and looking down on us from escarpments. Our rifle companies were reduced to

approximately 30 men per company. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> BN Exec Officer was wounded and I was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> BN Exec Officer. At this point we had come under heavy fire from enemy artillery fire and our BN was relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines and we were moved to the center of the island for rest and replacements. I was resting beside a road when an old Okinawa Jap came trotting down the road with a white goat on his neck crossbar. I spoke loud "Tecodowmama" which meant "lay down your weapons and surrender". The old man stopped and came over to me and said in good English, "I lived with my son in the Hawaiian Islands." I asked why all the civilians were still in the caves. He said the Jap soldiers had told them that the Americans would castrate the men and rape all the women if they were caught outside the cave. After our discussion he picked up the goat and trotted down the road. Shortly after the Okinawa Japs came out and returned to their homes (what were left of them).

**April 6 - June 8, 1945** The second BN was again committed to front line combat and I continued to operate as BN Exec Officer and BN Commander when Col Sterner was absent. We advanced slowly until we reached Dick Hill where the BN was stopped by the Japs main line of resistance on the "shuri" line. At that point I was BN Commander. With the aid of H Company mortar Sgt I devised a plan to bring 81 mortar smoke as close to F and G Company's front line as possible. They couldn't move because of heavy fire.

On **June 6, 1945** Col Dill informed me of a coordinated attack with the 77 division would be made on the next day. My command post was on Dick Hill with a good view of the front lines. When the order was given to attack I ordered H Company to lay down the smoke. Almost immediately Col Dill and Gen Easley were there. Col Dill asked whose smoke that was and I told him it was H Co's. He said raise it, we can't see. I said neither can the Japs. I raised the smoke and there was one soldier, Pvt. Craft G Co throwing grenades and firing his rifle down into the enemy cave. Others responded and broke enemy main line of resistance.

**June 8, 1945** I received orders to report to Reg. HQ. Col Dill said one officer and 3 non-coms have been picked from each division to report to Washington DC for 60 days and you have been selected to represent the 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. and Sgt Swain of your old E company was selected as one of the Sgt's. I was flown to L.A. then to Washington before I was allowed to report home. When I reported, I told Mildred that it was not a fairytale, but I was home on special assignment and would meet her in Dallas. She and Aunt Bobo with Joe Bob met me for a couple of days in Dallas. Joe Bob had very little to do with me. From there I was assigned to a speaking program to sell war bonds in Texas and New Mexico. Upon completion of that project I was sent back to Washington DC to the Pentagon building for a meeting with the other Okinawa group and the top generals of the armed forces so they could ask questions as to how their branch of the service could best serve on a combined effort to attack Japan. Each general asked questions of the Okinawa group. As a rule, the questions were answered by the officers until the armored division asked a question and Sgt Swain answered, "General I am Sgt. Swain, E Company, 382 Inf. I don't know whether you want to know what I think or not." The General said, "Sergeant, you are the one I want to especially hear what you think." Sgt. Swain made some good suggestions as to how the tanks could be equipped

so that an infantry man could ride on the back and use a retractable phone to point out targets for the tank. The General stood up and said, "Sgt. You made some good points and we will put them in our operation."

From the Pentagon, the Okinawa group was broken up and sent on special assignments. I was sent to Ft. Hood in Texas with Capt. Bell of the 77 Division to represent the infantry on a secret project called "Sphinx" where every branch of the service was represented to show what they could do to eliminate caves in anticipation that the Japs would be well dug in when we got there. The project was commanded by Brigadier Althaus. The project was laid out on a mile long brushy ridge with numerous gun emplacements and cement bunkers which were deviously camouflaged and could not be seen from the front or from the air. The General ordered the Air Force to strafe and bomb the entire area after which the artillery and self propelled big artillery fired on the hill. Then the Air Force sprayed the area with Napalm and set it on fire. When it went out, most all the gun implacements and bunkers were visible. The armored division with the support of the infantry and marines were ordered to attack and secure the area.

After the Sphinx project was completed, General Althaus wrote me a personal letter thanking me for my participation in this project. It is attached for further reference. Although it was July, Mildred was with me at Ft. Hood and our apartment had no air conditioning. From there I went to Seattle, Washington to return to the Pacific on Sept 20, 1945. The bomb was dropped in August and I did not have to go back.

After participating in the Sphinx Project, I was placed on active reserve and assigned to the Texas Military District, Austin, TX. I thought my military service was over. I moved my family to Pampa, TX and went back to work for Kewanee Oil Company on a repressuring project.

On June 13, 1951, I was ordered back to active duty and was ordered to report to 8 Infantry Division, Ft Jackson, SC. This order was later rescinded because Kewanee declared I was essential for producing oil and Dr. Overton, Mildred's doctor, declared her anemia would create a hardship to raise her children without my help. With this in mind, I applied for an Honorable Discharge from Military Service which was granted on **July 15, 1952**.