

Returning ARTHUR

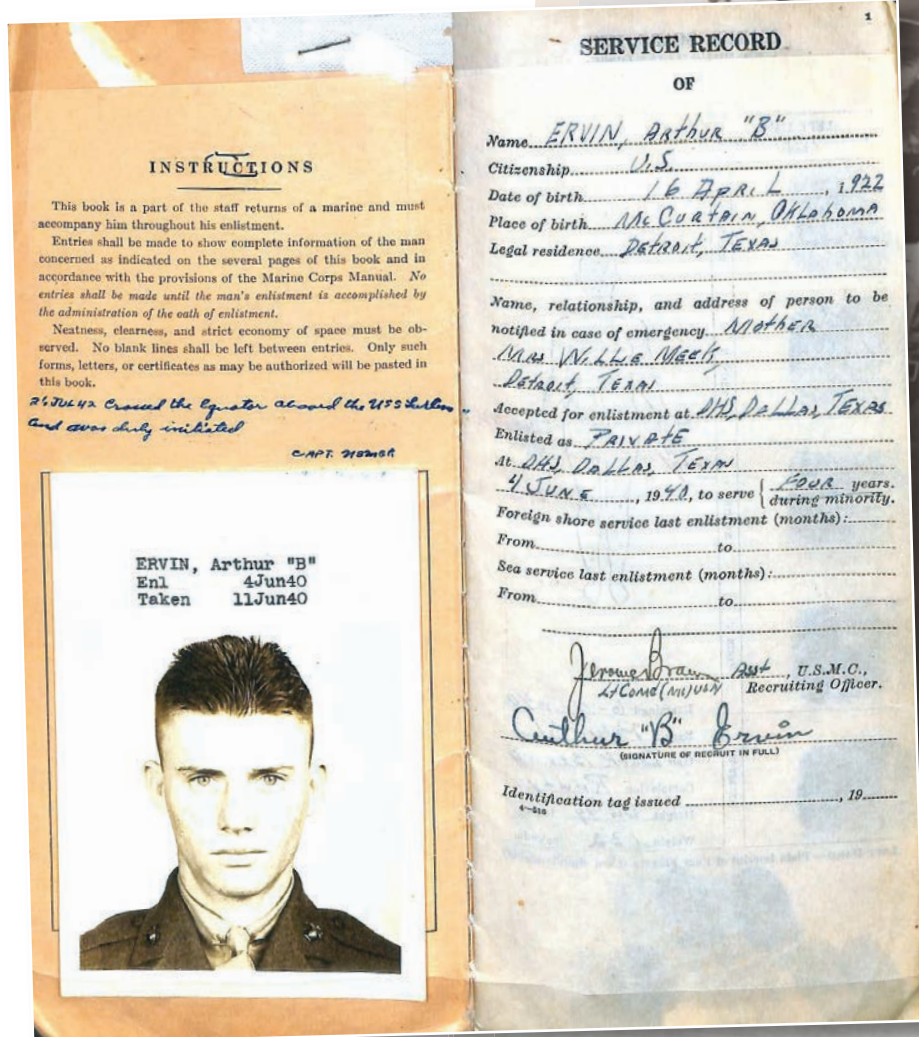
Arthur "B." Ervin
left home at 18 to
join the Marine Corps;
his service carried him
to Pearl Harbor, Pavuvu,
Roi-Namur, and Saipan.
Eighty-two years later,
the remains of the
Navy Cross recipient
and former Raider are
preparing for their
final journey.

By Geoffrey W. Roecker

June 4, 1940, promised to be business as usual at the recruiting office in Dallas, Texas.

Among the hopeful recruits was an 18-year-old with a slight build, dark brown hair and piercing blue eyes. After a physical examination, the recruit's fingerprints were rolled in ink, and he swore the required oath and signed his name on the proper lines: Arthur "B." Ervin. He left that night for the two-day journey to Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego.

Arthur was born in McCurtain, Okla., on April 16, 1922, the third and youngest son of Arthur Bee Ervin and Willie Ray Moore. Arthur Senior worked as a miner for Progressive Coal; an explosion took his life when little Arthur was just seven months old. Willie moved her boys to Le Flore County, where she met and married a widowed farmer named William Meek. By 1932, the Meek-Ervin family was living in the small town of Detroit, Texas. Arthur



This service record book accompanied Arthur Ervin through his time in the Marine Corps. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)

attended school in Red River County; he was active in the Baptist Young People's Union, enjoyed hunting and baseball, and helped care for his two little half-siblings Jesse and Barbara Jean.

Young Arthur yearned for broader horizons. In 1934, he moved to Los Angeles with his older brother Harley. He paused his education in the summer of 1938 to work as a "district circulation manager" at the *Los Angeles Examiner*, managing a team of 40 newsboys to the tune of \$45 per week. This cosmopolitan life was short-lived: in the summer of 1939, he went home to Texas to help his twice-widowed mother with the children and later lived in Florida with his oldest brother, Harry, a Navy radioman. This

may have provided the impetus for Arthur to enlist.

Ervin earned the title of Marine at San Diego and reported for duty at the Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor in October 1940. He arrived with a new buddy: Private James Henry Coupe of Falls City, Neb. Over the next year, "Jim and Art" became thick as thieves—both figuratively and literally. In November 1941, the pair stole a new model Plymouth Coupe, broke into Brown's Waikiki Milk Bar, and made off with \$75. Both Marines already had a few disciplinary remarks in their record books; now, charged with three significant crimes, they were thrown in the post brig to contemplate their fate.

The first Sunday of December began

Platoon 42 graduated from MCRD San Diego in July 1940. Among the new Marines was Arthur Ervin. (Photo courtesy of Kay Dyer Gay)



like any routine day. Ervin could likely hear the roar of patrol planes taking off and the footsteps of the guard relief, as he anticipated the National Anthem carried on the wind from a battleship's quarterdeck as the colors were hoisted. Then, at 7:57 a.m., new sounds—racing aircraft engines of a different timbre, explosions, gunfire, and shouts of alarm. Coupe and Ervin were released, issued pistols, and told to help where they could. In the aftermath of the surprise attack, they volunteered to help dig unexploded bombs out of the ground. That night, they surrendered their weapons and went back to their cells.

Military justice was not to be denied, even in a state of war, and a formal court-martial convened on Dec. 30, 1941. The charges were read off: "Unauthorized use of an automobile of another," "Burglary," and "Theft." Both Marines pleaded guilty and received a stiff sentence: a reduction to private and 24 months of confinement, followed by a dishonorable discharge. In



"The roughest, toughest, oldest U.S. Navy prison," Building 84 housed "prisoners of an intractable disposition or convicted for long terms" for more than 50 years. When it closed in 1946, "Old 84" had a maximum capacity of 650 inmates.

February 1942, Ervin and Coupe were sent to Mare Island to serve their time in the country's first purpose-built Navy prison.

The aging, overcrowded "Old 84" was regarded as one of the harshest places for a miscreant servicemember to serve his sentence. Prisoners worked hard labor, choked down terrible food, and did their time. For many, the shame of a Bad Conduct Discharge marked the end of their military service. However, in early 1942,

the Marine Corps was desperate for every able-bodied man it could get—especially those with combat experience. After two months, Ervin and Coupe were offered clemency: they would pay a fine, serve a year on probation, and make an official apology. "Ervin stated that since his country is at war, he wants nothing more than to do what he can to help," noted a court record, "that if it is at all possible, he would like to stay in the Marine Corps and after he has paid his penalty to join



Left: Marine Raiders head ashore from USS Sands (APD-13) on Feb. 21, 1943. They landed without opposition on Pavuvu Island. Inset: Cpl Arthur Ervin in October 1943, shortly after joining Co A, 24th Marines.

COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES



COURTESY OF GEOFFREY ROECKER

**Many wondered if the cold,
distant corporal would live up to
his reputation under fire.
As he sailed west for action for
the third time in as many years,
Arthur Ervin may have
wondered the same.**

the fight with his brother Marines; that if he is allowed to do this, he promises never to get in any trouble again.”

After a few weeks of supervised duty, Ervin and Coupe joined the newly formed 22nd Marines. The “Double Deuce” was an odd mixture of men. Many senior NCOs once served in Iceland with the 6th Marines; other groups were drawn from the guard battalions or barracks detachments of western Navy yards and depots. “Boots” like Private Edwin C. Bearss of Sarpy, Montana, made up the rest. When orders came to break camp and be ready to move, Bearss noticed that “many of those Pearl Harbor Marines were so excited they found it difficult to sleep.”

They were not headed for combat yet, however. On Aug. 1, 1942, after a long voyage aboard the former luxury liner *Lurline*, the 22nd Marines arrived at Apia

Harbor, Samoa. The charm and beauty of the island quickly wore off under a rough training schedule that highlighted shortcomings in individual training—and what Bearss called “the quota of sadistic or incompetent officers and senior NCOs” in the regiment. Anxious to get out of “the backwash of war,” many in the Double Deuce leaped at a proffered chance to join a new Raider unit forming at Malifauna. Ervin, Coupe, and Bearss were among the volunteers accepted into Company C, 3rd Raider Battalion.

On Feb. 21, 1943, Private First Class Ervin slid over the side of a rubber boat as it bumped ashore. His gun crew stowed their oars, picked up their weapons and boxes of .30-caliber ammunition, and hustled into the coconut palms that grew almost to the shoreline. All around them were signs of recent Japanese occupation but not a single enemy soldier was seen.

By 12 p.m., the Marines were in possession of Pavuvu in the Russell Islands.

Occupying Pavuvu would prove more taxing to the Raiders. “Troop morale was at its lowest and ugliest,” commented a veteran, and while the men practiced combat patrolling, the real enemies were hunger, boredom, and mosquitos. Arthur Ervin was a good leader—on March 1 he made corporal and took over a machine gun squad—but also displayed a stubborn streak. He caught malaria on Pavuvu and sweated out six weeks of increasing fatigue, joint pain, and swollen glands before going to sick bay. Doctors diagnosed malaria, dengue, and “possible filariasis.” The first two ailments could be treated, but the latter had no cure; the only course of action was transfer to a cooler, drier climate where the disease would go dormant. The alternative was too terrible to contemplate—many Marines swore to seeing Samoan men afflicted with elephantiasis carrying their swollen genitals in wheeled carts.

Corporal Ervin’s Raider career was over. On May 21, 1943, he bade farewell to Jim Coupe. Ervin went back to the States; Coupe stayed with the Raiders. They would never see each other again. Sergeant Coupe was killed in action along Bougainville’s Piva Trail in November.

Ervin headed back to Red River County for a 30-day sick leave and returned to California a married man. How Arthur and Odena Gladys Good met is no longer known, but they were married on July 17, 1943, when he was 21 years old and she was just 17. Odena set up their home in Los Angeles while Arthur reported to the 4th Marine Division at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton.

Corporal Ervin joined Company A, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines in September 1943. He missed life in the Raiders and made no effort to hide his opinion. Enlisted men found him cold and aloof, even intimidating. “In all the time we were together, I never knew him to hardly smile, let alone laugh,” commented PFC George A. Smith. Officers disapproved of the corporal’s attitude towards taking orders. “Ervin was pretty much an individualist, and on first impression, not a top-notch NCO,” noted First Lieutenant Frederic A. Stott. For a time, Ervin was defined by his ailment—his platoon

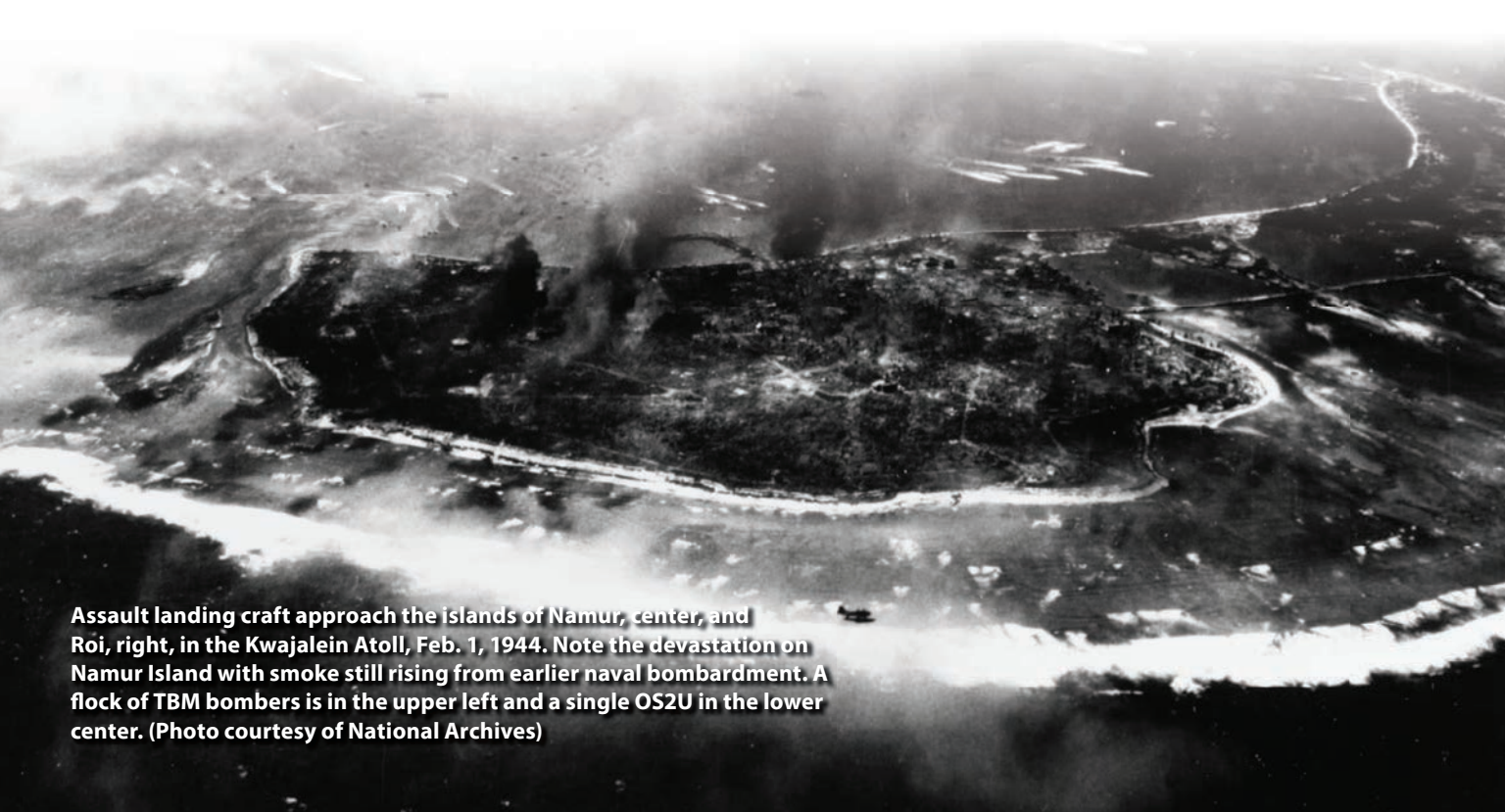
leader, 1stLt Philip E. Wood Jr., complained that “one of my squad leaders has an incurable Samoan disease”—and men joked about Corporal “MuMu” (the Samoan word for the ailment) when Ervin was safely out of earshot. He managed to make one friend, but after one liberty in Los Angeles, the other Marine had to be transferred from the platoon. Rumors swirled that Odena was somehow involved.

As the year ended, morale in Company A was high. “This is a crack outfit,” boasted Lieutenant Wood, “We’re good and will soon prove it.” Ervin sweated along with the rest—he was responsible for an entire machine gun, plus its five-man crew—and received generally high marks on his professional record. However, Ervin was still something of an unknown quantity to his comrades, both personally and professionally. When the company boarded USS *DuPage* (APA-41) on Jan. 11, 1944, and headed to sea, many wondered if the cold, distant corporal would live up to his reputation under fire. As he sailed west for action for the third time in as many years, Arthur Ervin may have wondered the same.

Right: In New River, N.C., around December 1942: George Smith, center, with fellow Marines, John “JJ” Franey, left, and Howard “Howie” Haff, all of whom served with Arthur Ervin. The three Marines survived the war despite their wounds and were friends the rest of their lives. Looking through the door is Merle “Mother” Geesaman.



COURTESY OF GEOFFREY ROECKER



Assault landing craft approach the islands of Namur, center, and Roi, right, in the Kwajalein Atoll, Feb. 1, 1944. Note the devastation on Namur Island with smoke still rising from earlier naval bombardment. A flock of TBM bombers is in the upper left and a single OS2U in the lower center. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)

A machine gun team from the 24th Marines takes cover in a crater during the battle for Namur, Feb. 1, 1944.

The first day of February 1944 found the twin islands of Roi and Namur ablaze, belching black smoke into the sky as American battleships, cruisers, and destroyers pummeled every square foot above sea level. Aircraft roared overhead, dropping bombs or swooping low to strafe the shore. Lessons learned at last November's Betio bloodbath were being put into action. Still, the worry of "another Tarawa" was foremost in many minds.

Corporal Arthur Ervin collected his personal gear and weapon, bit off a chew of tobacco, and got his squad moving over the side of *DuPage*. As they bobbed and rocked in the surf, a few of the younger gunners began reciting lines from "Mutiny on the Bounty." A battleship loosed a broadside, nearly swamping the little Higgins boat and silencing the jokesters. They shivered in the cold spray and wondered if any enemies would be left when they got ashore.

A blockhouse exploded with an ear-shattering blast, and debris rained from the sky, wounding several men as "a dense cloud of dust, cordite, and body parts" enveloped the boat. Moments later the ramp went down, and Corporal Arthur Ervin stepped onto the sand of Namur. The island resembled "a super No Man's Land," but the unflappable corporal trotted off to the head of the column. "As long as he was in action, he stayed at least 50 yards ahead of anyone else in the company," noted Lieutenant



USMC

Wood. His inspiring bravado made him a conspicuous target. Suddenly, the ground at Ervin's feet shifted, and the muzzle of an Arisaka rifle appeared, aiming up at the corporal at point-blank range.

The .25-caliber bullet ripped upwards along Ervin's torso, leaving a long burn mark without breaking the skin. Seconds later, the ambusher was dead, and Ervin was scampering back down the road to his squad, looking pained. Solicitous Marines gathered around, asking where he was hit. In response, Ervin spat his tobacco to the ground. The gunshot had startled him into swallowing his chew; vomiting in front of his squad worried him more than the close call. The normally emotionless corporal treated his Marines to a rare smile before

heading off, the self-declared point man for Company A.

Ervin was in his element. He located a half-dozen Japanese troops in a dugout, pitched a few grenades, then organized a successful assault. Another blockhouse started spitting fire; Ervin led the way through a deserted trench system and then, annoyed by his more cautious comrades, hopped out to flank the fortification. A pistol shot knocked off his helmet and sprayed his face with bits of lead; Ervin "got mad for the first time" and took out another machine gun. He reached the blockhouse just as a bazooka round punched through the concrete; Ervin pitched grenades through the hole and disappeared inside, closely followed by



The mortar section of A/1/24 at Camp Maui, April 1944. Ervin, the acting section sergeant, is squatting at far left. (Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Roecker)

1st Lt Harry D. Reynolds Jr. Shots and cries echoed from within, but Ervin wasn't finished. "He hopped up on top of the blockhouse and stood there silhouetted against the sky," wrote Wood, "legs spread apart, hatless, with blood on his face and his coat flung open, firing his rifle from the hip."

A dugout full of Japanese troops had the temerity to shoot back. Ervin hopped off the blockhouse and charged their position but was felled by a through-and-through bullet wound in his chest. He tumbled into a shell hole while his buddies yelled for a corpsman. "He said he didn't want any help," continued Wood, "and hauled himself out with his [good] arm." Ervin "claimed he could still throw grenades" and wound up in a screaming argument with Lieutenants Wood and Reynolds, who had to order him off the field. Ervin steamed off under his own power but, dizzy with pain and adrenaline, was finally carried away on a stretcher.

Surgeons aboard USS *Solace* (AH-5) provided excellent care, and by the time Ervin arrived at Aiea Heights Naval Hospital, he complained only of "slight superficial tenderness" around his wounds. He received his Purple Heart while recuperating in Pearl Harbor and mailed the medal off to Odena before returning to his company on March 24, 1944. "Certainly glad to get back with the guys again," he commented. "I can do almost everything I did before. It never bothers me in the least."

The Marine Corps reorganized while Ervin was in the hospital; the mixed weapons platoon was no more, and Lieutenant Wood wanted "a hell of a good man" to help run the company's 60 mm mortars. Although a machine gunner by training, and still only a corporal, Ervin's reputation and experience soon had him "squaring the section away in fine shape." A powerful bond quickly developed between the lieutenant and the NCO. Ervin was "not given to affection," noted a comrade, "but the mutual admiration and respect which grew between the two was obvious, and they were a strongly attached pair who worked together as well as any and better than most." Indeed, it appears that the relationship transcended professionalism and became quite personal—even friendly.

On the surface, Wood and Ervin were polar opposites. Wood, an aspiring lawyer from a family of artists, was a gangly Ivy Leaguer who tended to wear his emotions on his sleeve—very much a civilian in uniform when compared to the Texan who "pissed ice water" (according to the mortarmen) and seemed to relish combat. However, a few conversations between the two would have revealed more subtle

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the NAVY CROSS to
CORPORAL ARTHUR B. ERVIN, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS,
for service as set forth in the following



CITATION:

"For extraordinary heroism while serving with Company A, First Battalion, Twenty-fourth Marines, Fourth Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the Invasion of Namur Island, Kwajalein Atoll, on 1 February 1944. Advancing with his company around the eastern perimeter of the Island, Corporal Ervin skillfully located and led the attack upon each hostile strong point in this zone of action. Although wounded in a singlehanded assault upon an enemy heavy machine-gun nest, he returned to initiate a raid into an occupied blockhouse and, after climbing to a dangerously exposed position on its top, immediately poured rifle fire into a nearby Japanese trench fortification and exhorted his comrades to press home their attack. When painfully wounded for the second time, he gallantly refused to let anyone endanger himself by coming forward to help and, after pulling himself to safety and having his wounds dressed, retired only on the orders of his Commanding Officer. His determined fighting spirit and inspiring performance of duty throughout these bitter engagements reflect the highest credit upon Corporal Ervin and the United States Naval Service.

**"He hopped up on top of
the blockhouse and
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against the sky,
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hatless, with blood on
his face and his coat
flung open, firing his
rifle from the hip."**

—1stLt Philip E. Wood Jr.

similarities. Wood and Ervin had individualistic and effective approaches to leadership, centering around disdain for petty discipline and military minutiae. Both men had lost their fathers (Wood's died in 1940), and both feared losing their loves. Wood's fiancée called off their wedding at the last minute, and Ervin was hearing rumors from home about Odena. He laid out his feelings in a letter to his older brother, Harley "Bud" Ervin:

"I don't want Neg [his nickname for Odena] ever to feel obligated to me. I want to tell you how I feel about Neg. Bud, she is the only one for me, but thing are all the way [or] not at all, know what I



COURTESY OF GEOFFREY ROECKER

Ervin grins for a portrait intended for his family back home. His fellow Marines rarely saw him smile or laugh.

mean? I don't want to be on something and hing go haywire."

Bud was apparently already cautioning his younger brother, for Arthur also included the following information. "Bud, I did change my insurance if anyone gets it, Mom will get it all, I didn't change it because of what you said in your letter, I had already for a coup e reasons of my own. I know that neither you or Kay would and ever did ie to me."

The news was not all gloomy. "I was awarded the 'Navy Cross' by Admiral Nimitz last Wednesday," Ervin continued. "I am damn proud of it and sending it home to Mother." The formal presentation

at Camp Maui honored 62 4th Marine Division men who distinguished themselves at Roi-Namur. Ervin stood at rigid attention as Nimitz pinned on the blue and white ribbon and offered a handshake. The “tough little hard-boiled corporal told me afterward that he almost burst into tears,” said Wood. The celebration that followed was one to remember—or not, as Wood confided, “it was a pretty drunken night.” Ervin pinned on sergeant the next day.

Not two weeks after the award ceremony, the 4th Marine Division left their tent city at Camp Maui and boarded trucks for a short drive to the Kahului docks and the questionable comfort of troop compartments aboard USS *Calvert* (APA-32). Amphibious landing practice, including division-sized landings, and rehearsals for a multitude of plans consumed much of the month of May. For several days *Calvert* docked at Pearl Harbor, and the men were allowed ashore for supervised recreation within the limits of the Navy Yard. It may have felt like something of a homecoming for Ervin—especially when sirens started blaring and smoke rose into the sky above West Loch. A loading accident, not enemy action, caused the conflagration that destroyed several landing ships and killed hundreds of men, but the event was a heavy reminder of the dangers soon to come.

Calvert departed Hawaii in convoy on May 29, 1944. Once at sea, the objective was announced: the 4th Marine Division would be invading Saipan. Operation orders were issued, inspected, and digested. Bored Marines engrossed themselves in card games, books, or Monopoly. Some wrote letters home; these were deposited for mailing at Eniwetok. Whether Ervin had much to say on this voyage isn’t known, nor are his thoughts and feelings about returning to the battlefield.

In fact, only a few details about the final three weeks of Arthur Ervin’s life are known for sure. On June 15, 1944, after participating in a diversionary landing off Saipan’s northern coast, he came ashore and marched with his company through the ruins of Charan Kanoa. The mortar section was kept busy firing missions ahead of assaults and responding to Japanese attacks. Ever aggressive, Ervin volunteered to lead a combat patrol against a bypassed Japanese unit on June 20, 1944, and with “outstanding leadership, excellent judgement, and complete disregard for his own personal safety” demolished a “strong pocket of enemy resistance”

The shooter knew more Americans would come to the rescue, exposing themselves in attempts to save their leader—and he was right. Arthur Ervin jumped up ... yelling, “Don’t worry, Phil! I’m coming for you!”



Treasured family heirlooms: Arthur Ervin’s Navy Cross, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Raider patch.

without suffering a single casualty. His officers took note, and Lieutenant Wood began mentally drafting another citation for the plucky sergeant.

The orders for July 5, 1944—D-plus-20—were familiar. “Company A was preparing to move forward again by annihilating the enemy,” wrote the skipper, Captain Irving Schechter. “Phil

[Wood] was firing his mortars in preparation.” Spotters called out general targets in the area of advance: a steeply sloping hill dotted with small buildings, caves, and ravines. The attack was scheduled to start promptly at 1 p.m., and all was proceeding as planned.

Suddenly a small group of civilians appeared, struggling towards the Marine lines. The mortars stopped firing, and within moments Wood and Ervin hurried up to Schechter. “As always,” reported the captain, “Phil and Sgt Ervin asked if they could take a patrol forward and help the natives back of our lines.” They soon returned with a collection of wounded Chamorro women and children. They had been hiding in a nearby cave; many more were still trapped, including most of the men. Enemy fighters were there too, they warned, “more than 1,000 Japanese soldiers and Marines ahead. Many without rifles, no big guns.”

Lieutenant Wood and Sergeant Ervin faced a crucial decision. Estimates of Japanese strength, though surely inflated, clearly indicated a waiting trap. On the other hand, a bombardment and assault by Marines would take a heavy toll on the helpless civilians. They had mere minutes to make up their minds: the attack needed to progress on a timetable, and King Hour was fast approaching.

The deliberations are lost, but the outcome is known. “Phil returned to the caves with his patrol,” continued Schechter. “When he was about 30 yards away, he was hit.” A Japanese bullet struck the lieutenant’s hip and exited through the abdomen. The shooter knew more Americans would come to the rescue, exposing themselves in attempts to save their leader—and he was right. Arthur Ervin jumped up, “running like a lost calf after its mother,” according to one man, yelling “Don’t worry, Phil! I’m coming for you!” according to another—and took off for his friend, with a corpsman right behind him. The Japanese gun barked again; the corpsman was shot through the shoulder, and Arthur Ervin took a bullet in his brain. He was likely dead before he hit the ground.

Mayhem erupted in the ravine as the survivors fired blindly into the trees; “a dozen men were riddled” before a rescue platoon broke the ambush. When the battle ended, a few men ventured forward to inspect the nearby cave. Nearly 60 Chamorro, Okinawan, and Japanese civilians were escorted to safety—spared from almost certain death by the actions

COURTESY OF DIANE THOMPSON



SSGT MAURICE GABER, USMC

Civilians approach 4thMarDiv lines on Saipan as smoke from a mortar barrage looms in the background. Their arrival is believed to be the event that sparked Wood and Ervin's final patrol.

of the patrol. Ervin, Wood, and four other Marines gave their lives.

As the designated next of kin, Odena received Arthur's final payouts from the Marine Corps. She signed for a package of his belongings—a protractor, a ring, letters and snapshots, Japanese wallets, a religious book, a single penny. She received another package in the mail in 1945: Arthur's dog tags, a bundle of letters, and other personal items. A well-meaning Seabee stationed on Saipan found the cache wrapped in a Japanese battle flag and stuffed into an empty ammunition box. He found Odena's name, determined her relationship, and mailed the mementos back to California. The *Los Angeles Times* took enough notice to send a photographer and write a small column about the discovery.

Odena's late husband's life insurance meant a \$10,000 payout—just what a young woman working at the Goodyear plant needed. However, instead of a check, Odena received a legal notice: her mother-in-law, Willie Meek, was claiming the money. Odena had the official paperwork, but Willie had the letter from Arthur stating his intent to change beneficiaries. Neither woman was about to back down, and the case went to court. An emotionally charged debate ensued, and in April of

1946, a jury declared that Willie Meek was the lawful beneficiary. Acrimony between the families deepened until the Fifth Circuit Court heard *Gann v. Meek* and upheld Willie's right to the insurance.

The court battle overshadowed another, far more tragic question: what became of Arthur Ervin's body. In June of 1946, Odena and Willie received notices that “despite all efforts [by the Marine Graves Registration Service], the remains of the late Sergeant Arthur B. Ervin have not yet been identified.” Little other information was available to the family or, indeed, to military authorities, who declared Ervin “permanently non-recoverable” in 1949.

The truth of the matter was far more complicated.

On July 6, 1944, the busy Graves Registration troops at the 4th Marine Division Cemetery buried approximately two dozen men. Information was taken from each man; reports from their organizations were read, identification tags checked, and fingerprints taken if possible. A few of the bodies still had personal belongings; these were cataloged and sorted for shipment home to the next of kin. It was an efficient process—one repeated more than 800 times in three weeks at this one cemetery—and it was rare for a man to be buried as unidentified.

There was one such case on July 6. The body intended for Grave 829 had no ready means of identification—no tags, no personal effects, no legible name on clothing. He was buried with Technical Sergeant Arnold R. Richardson on one side and 1stLt Philip E. Wood Jr. on the other. Farther down the row were PFC Davis V. Kruse, PFC Lawrence E. Knight, and PFC Frank R. Hester. These identified men belonged to A/1/24, and all were victims of a fatal patrol the previous day.

The unknown man lay undisturbed until March 1948 when diggers from the 9105th Technical Services Unit arrived at his grave. Specialists of the 604th Graves Registration Company carefully removed his bones from the decaying poncho, noted a bullet hole in the skull, and checked for identification tags or a report of interment. Neither were found, and the unknown man became “X-64” of the 4th Marine Division Cemetery, Saipan. His remains were shipped to a military mausoleum in Manila and lay in storage for another two years.

A board of officers convened on Feb. 13, 1950, to determine the final disposition of unidentifiable remains held in Manila. “The records pertaining to Unknown X-64 have been reviewed,” they wrote, “and it is the opinion of this office that insufficient evidence is available to estab-

NAVJAG H-4
DENTAL RECORD
(To be filled in by the dental officer)

DO NOT REMOVE FROM HEALTH RECORD

ERVIN 285039
ARTHUR B
Date: Place **OKLA** Date **4-16-22**

INSTRUCTIONS
See Chapter 14, Section VI, Paragraphs 2811-2819, inclusive, Manual of the Medical Department, U. S. Navy.

RECORD OF FIRST DENTAL EXAMINATION

HEIGHT — 5' 7 1/2"
WEIGHT — 134
HAIR — BLACK
RACE — WHITE
FRACTURE — NONE

RECORD OF SUBSEQUENT DENTAL OPERATIONS

TOOTH CHART

RIGHT SIDE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

LEFT SIDE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

REMARKS:

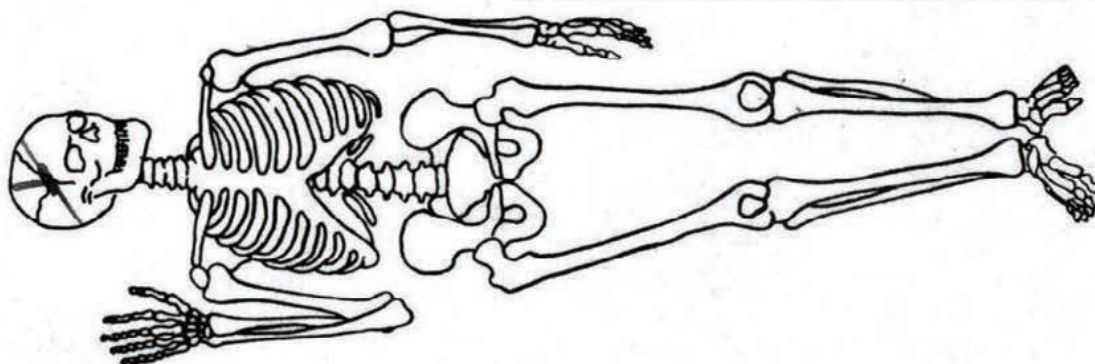
REPTURES (Plaster): Draw diagram of relative size and shape of plate, showing the location of natural teeth with the words, "upper" and "lower".

OD Campbell
10044

PLOT OR SECTION		
	4	3
MOMME, F.W. 464665 USMCR 244	RICHARDSON, A.R. 264338 USMC 227	RICHARDS, T. 501361 USMCR 244
DUGGAN, J.P. 504532 USMC	X-64	FREY, W.E. HAD 719 USMCR
SIKES, D.M. 471071 USMCR	WOOD, JR. P.E. 014216 USMCR	FROST, R.C. 432148 USMCR
ALSON, W.J. 839671 USMCR	KRUSE, D.N. 485603 USMCR	DAYIES, W.D. 298344 USMCR
IELDS, E.R. 480246 USMC 244	KNIGHT, L.E. 815009 USMC 231	PLEMENT, G. 458568 USMC 244
KSTROM, W.A. 718169 USMCR	ST. JOHN, E.V. 503533 USMCR	MACK, J.F. 399943 USMC
DWELL, C.W. 531850 USMCR	KALINOWSKI, M.S. 436622 USMCR	LEWIS, T.Q. 261496 USMC

The NAVMED H-4 dental chart, above left, from Ervin's service record shows distinct similarities to the postmortem dental chart of X-64. Attempts to identify X-64 after the war included completing this skeletal chart, below, which shows evidence of a head wound. Details of a post-war diagram of the 4th Marine Division Cemetery on Saipan, above right, place X-64 in the middle of other A/1/24 casualties of the July 5 patrol. (Courtesy of National Archives)

19. BLACK OUT PARTS OF BODY NOT RECOVERED



lish the identity of this decedent, and that these remains should be classed as unidentifiable." The following month, X-64 was committed to his final resting place, "a comrade in arms known but to God."

Six decades later, this author set out to learn more about his Marine ancestor, Philip Wood, and the mysterious sergeant who died beside him. With the assistance of Ervin's former comrade, George Smith, and Ted Darcy's WFI Research Group, X-64 was tentatively associated with the remains of Arthur Ervin in 2011. Seven years later, X-64 was exhumed from the Manila American Cemetery; three more passed before a suitable DNA match could be found through the family of his half-sister Barbara Jean Dyer, and in June of

2022, Marine Corps Casualty Resource Officers informed the Ervin family that his remains were positively identified as X-64. Sadly, neither Barbara nor George lived to see the outcome they so dearly desired.

One mystery remains unsolved: how did Arthur Ervin's belongings—including his dog tags, letters, and other personal items that would have confirmed his identity—wind up stuffed in a box and dumped in a field on Saipan? The decision destroyed his identity and wounded his family for decades.

The final chapter of Arthur Ervin's long saga is coming to an end. He will be buried, at long last, in accordance with the wishes of his next of kin.

Author's bio: Geoffrey W. Roecker is a researcher and writer based in upstate New York. His extensive writing on the WW II history of 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, is available online at www.1-24thmarines.com. Roecker is the author of "Leaving Mac Behind: The Lost Marines of Guadalcanal" and advocates for the return of missing personnel at www.missingmarines.com.

Editor's note: To read more about Geoffrey Roecker and his quest to ensure the identification of Arthur Ervin's remains, read "History Detective: Volunteer Researcher Works to Unearth the Stories of Missing World War II Marines" in the April issue of Leatherneck.