

Torii Teller

Bell's Necessity

Iwakuni Weekly

April 11, 1966



THE STATION'S
TELEPHONE EXCHANGE

Vietnam

Hot Saturday's Hero

They say GySgt. Talmadge R. Downing looked like a hero straight out of a war movie that hot Saturday afternoon during Operation Utah.

Tal Downing, from Middleton, Ohio, is a weapons platoon sergeant with M Co., 1st Regt., 3d Marine Div.

He was in a rear position with his 81mm mortar section when M Co. moved onto a small plateau believed to be occupied by Viet Cong. Any doubt quickly disappeared when a fusillade of guerrilla fire tore into the company's ranks.

Fire in the Rear. As the unit launched an assault against the VC positions, Downing moved forward to get first hand information on the situation.

The enemy was strongly entrenched and fighting from spider holes, fox holes with connecting tunnels, caves and fortified positions. The executive officer, 1stLt. Latham Boone III, pointed out a sniper in the trees who was firing upon the company's rear, slowing the Marine attack.

Gunny Downing didn't hesitate. With the exec's permission he organized a temporary rifle squad, combining volunteers from company headquarters with his weapons platoon to form a nine-man unit.

Armed with a pistol, Downing led his men into battle, and almost immediately was shot at.

Up & Hit. Downing and Sgt. Marvin C. Hedrick skirted the woodline to find the sniper's position. The other men took cover while the sniper took pot shots at them.

"Give me your rifle," Downing growled at Hedrick. "I'm going to get that..."

"Careful," cautioned Hedrick, "he's hitting pretty close." But Downing

jumped up to get a look at the VC's position.

"That's when the Gunny got hit," said Hedrick later. "He fell right in front of me and at first I thought he'd had it."

But he was only shot in the shoulder. After Hedrick gave him first aid, Downing again stood to face the sniper. This time it was the Marine who fired first. The sniper never fired again.

Grenade in the Hole. The gunny waved his men forward. As his small band moved out, Downing spotted a freshly-dug hole. He cautiously went to check it out.

A uniformed North Vietnamese soldier burst out with a blazing sub-machine gun. Downing rolled to the ground, firing back with his pistol. The Red ran back into his hole and Downing used the lull to scamper for cover.

"Toss me a grenade," he ordered a Marine near him. He caught the grenade, yanked out the pin and held the safety spoon down as he began to crawl forward. Then, in one swift motion, he stood, threw the grenade into the hole and charged the position, firing his pistol as the grenade exploded.

From the smoking hole he pulled the dead North Vietnamese. Downing quickly relieved the enemy of his automatic weapon and extra ammunition magazines.

To the Death. Again the gunny's small force advanced. Five more VC positions lay ahead of them. Four were quickly destroyed, but the last was manned by die-hard Viet Cong who chose to fight to the death.

As the make-shift squad methodically gained fire superiority, Downing got an opportunity to rush the bunker.

Armed with two grenades this time, he streaked toward the enemy, firing the captured machine gun on full automatic. As he passed the position he hurled the grenades into its entrance and tumbled to the ground.

After the explosion, six dead VC, a large store of ammunition, medical supplies, documents and other equipment were found in the position. The bunker had apparently housed an enemy command post.

'We'll Never Forget.' Then it was over. In the wake of Downing's squad lay 15 Viet Cong bodies.

After M Co. was replaced by a fresh Marine unit, Downing had his wounds treated by a corpsman, but refused medical evacuation until two days later when the operation ended.

"None of us who saw him that Saturday afternoon will ever forget him in action," recalled Hedrick. "Gunny Downing looked like John

Wayne, zig-zagging across the battlefield with blood trickling down his arm, his helmet cocked to one side, his pistol and two ammo magazines crammed into his belt and him charging the VC, spraying them with that captured gun. Only the whole show was for real — as the VC found out the hard way."

A Daily, Deadly Game

The Marines in the squad patrol happened to be from E Co., 9th Regt., but they could have been from any outfit, for the patrol was typical of that experienced by thousands of troops in Vietnam every day.

It began in the faint light of dawn, men huddled in two's and three's, adjusting their cartridge belts and laughing about some "inside" joke.

The squad leader told the point fire team to begin its movement and talk was ended. In total silence the squad began its daily chore of being "it" in a deadly game of hide-and-seek. Those in hiding — Viet Cong guerrillas — have a nasty way of announcing their hiding spots with a burst of automatic fire.

VC Drums. For hours the squad probed the terrain — now open rice paddies, now jungle, now dry fields shoulder-high in tapioca plants. At the bank of a nameless river, near a known VC crossing point, the column broke in half, one segment moving around to sweep through a hamlet and push ahead of them toward the river, where the other group waited in ambush, any fleeing enemy.

Bamboo drums — the usual VC signal device — beat a steady tattoo while the squeeze play was executed and the two halves reunited without incident. The march continued.

Half an hour later, the drums began again. Five minutes passed and then three or four rounds of sniper fire whined through the trees.

Back for Lunch. After a moment's consultation, the front of the column laid down a brief volley of fire and assaulted the area from where the enemy fire had come. They found no one. There was a hut, obviously inhabited earlier that morning, but not even a woman or child was present.

The drums ended their monotonous pong-pong-pong and the Marines moved on along the patrol route. A noontime sun drenched the column in sweat as it made its way back into the company perimeter, where another squad was being readied for an afternoon patrol.

"For a while there," one of the riflemen said to the squad leader, "I didn't think we were going to get back in time for lunch."



DOWNING'S SQUAD IN ACTION

Just like John Wayne.

Units

Bell's Necessity

Nearly every day some new convenience is invented, tested, perfected, and eventually put on the market for public consumption. A couple of generations later, some of these conveniences become necessities to those who never lived without them. And thus, civilization has built itself for centuries into a neat, interlocking network of dependence on man-made mechanical devices. But as man progresses his ability diminishes to live comfortably if one link in the progression is halted, even temporarily.

For example, if a computer at the New York Stock Exchange fails, the people who operate it and those awaiting its results are thrown into a tither. If a car fails to get a man to work on time, he is frustrated — so is his boss — and the job he is supposed to be doing goes undone, affecting even more people.

Important Tool. If electric power in a large region goes on the blink, such as the blackout last summer in New York City, the result is mass consternation. The lights go out, household appliances won't work. And, that which has become a most important tool in social circles, business dealings and even defense, will not operate: the telephone.

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone back in 1876 it was a convenience, not a necessity. Within the confines of the small villages of Bell's day it was not at all difficult to walk to someone's house with a message. However, as telephone lines began to lengthen and intersect, it became an indispensable business instrument and a comforting warning system in the event of danger or disaster. Then came automobiles and airplanes, and men and women began to disperse further than ever before from their places of birth. The telephone kept them in communication with one another.

One Quick Call. As progress piled upon progress, the telephone kept the pace and in some cases set it. One quick call can bring the fire or police department racing to the rescue. The president of the United States even directs his military commands by use of the telephone.

The telephone has become such a common household item in most homes and business establishments in the U.S. and other parts of the world, that the people who use it seldom realize their dependence on the instrument. Most psychiatrists would probably agree that if all telephones suddenly became inoperative because of some mechanical failure, the mental institutions would do a booming business. Many wouldn't be able to adjust. To take the telephone

away from society now, 90 yrs. after its invention, would probably be to invite disaster.

Locally, the telephones in each office and housing facility aboard the station are instrumental in keeping military operations at Iwakuni running smoothly, without undue delays. And at Iwakuni, as anywhere in the world, the man who picks up the receiver to dial a number is subconsciously displaying confidence in the many men and women behind the scenes, who insure that the number he dials will ring another telephone, and that the ensuing conversation will be as clear and audible as possible. At the air station, at least, that confidence is well deserved. Complaints about the service are so infrequent that local officials can't remember when the last one was voiced.

The NTTPC. At Iwakuni, and all other U.S. military bases in Japan, the tele-



STANLEY (R) CONFERRING WITH NTTPC OFFICIALS

Complaints are so infrequent, they can't remember when the last one was voiced.

phone service is supplied under the U.S.-Japan status of forces agreement by the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation (NTTPC), a Japanese government owned, operated and maintained corporate enterprise. NTTPC employ's, controls and supervises roughly 60 men and women to operate all phases of the local telephone exchange. These employees are not screened by the Industrial Relations Office and Naval Intelligence as are all other Japanese working aboard the station (Torii Teller, March 7), but are selected and hired directly by the NTTPC. About the only responsibility falling to Iwakuni military personnel is to provide liaison and insure that the corporation is informed of the station's communication needs.

The task of keeping NTTPC up to date on the base's telephone service requirements and insuring that they are met is handled by the station communications department, headed by Capt. C.A. Donaldson. "They seldom leave anything else for us to do," says Donaldson, who is also listed as the telephone officer. "Those people (NTTPC employees) are very efficient and cooperative." However, in the event some problem should arise, Donaldson has a qualified man there at the exchange to lend a hand, telephone chief SSgt. Richard L. Stanley. Stanley, who is well-schooled in telephone systems, keeps in daily contact with local NTTPC administrators, aids and advises them when necessary.

Incredibly Well. Iwakuni's telephone exchange is essentially divided into four main sections: administration, directory service, operation and maintenance. The administrative section is set up similar to the military's four

staff sections, with personnel, intelligence, operations and logistics and supply offices. The directory service is handled by one woman, directory clerk Miyoko Kamei. She notes all the changes and prepares a new personnel directory every 3 mos., and a new organizational directory every half year. The operation section includes the 17 bi-lingual operators, who work the switch boards on 8-hr. shifts around the clock. The operators are the only NTTPC employees that are required to speak English.

By far the largest department is the maintenance section. The 29 maintenance men are responsible for the internal and external upkeep of the entire system. And that they have managed to keep Iwakuni's telephone service operating so well is incredible, considering that most of the equipment they maintain was in use before World War II. Nearly everything in the exchange, except a recently installed new ringing system, was impounded and brought to Iwakuni from Kure at the end of the war.

Saving \$6. In addition to testing and repairing internal discrepancies, the maintenance men are responsible for keeping all connections sound and repairing damaged instruments. Every telephone they are able to repair at Iwakuni saves the station about \$6 — the cost of repairing a phone at the factory, no matter what is wrong with it. In all, the maintenance department works on about 100 telephones a month, and keeps five pay phones on station cleared of clogging American coins.

As a branch of the local exchange, the Kokusai Denshin Company Limited

provides an overseas operator at the telephone office, to furnish long distance and overseas telephone and telegraph service for Iwakuni servicemen. The operator, Sachiko Shigetomi, works at the office from 8 am until 4:30 pm, and most times later, every day except Wednesdays. She handles approximately 150-200 overseas calls a week, but notes that few servicemen take advantage of the telegraph service.

As a whole the Iwakuni telephone exchange is a \$100,000 a year operation, with some 1,600 lines and 2,000 telephones scattered throughout the station and around 30 main trunk lines leading in and out of Iwakuni to other bases in the region, such as Yokosuka, Atsugi, Okinawa and Korea. One of SSgt. Stanley's jobs is to keep the annual cost as low as possible by frequently inspecting and recommending changes in the type of service offered to the various sections on station.

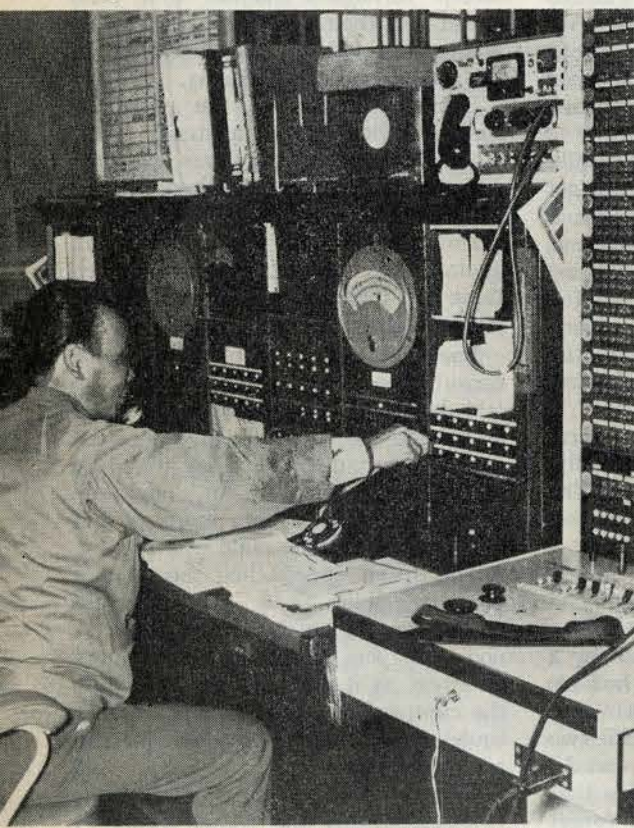
Same Priority. Last December he managed to cut costs by \$1,304.65 per month by removing 45 unneeded "A" class telephones (numbers which begin with "2"), on which calls can be made directly to Iwakuni City. A few were replaced with "C" class phones (numbers which begin with "3"), which can ring base numbers only. The cost of each off-station call made on a class "A" phone is only ¥7, but multiplied by an average 670 calls a day to off-base numbers, the monthly cost is roughly \$400.

Class "B" service is the designation for those instruments supplied to the dependent housing areas, which are paid for by the subscribers. Dependents

who live off station must subscribe directly through the NTTPC for telephone service. It usually takes Japanese civilians about 2 yrs. to get a telephone after submitting a request, but through the status of forces agreement, U.S. military dependents are given the same priority as Japanese government officials. Their telephones are usually installed within a few days. While the Japanese must pay a ¥10,300 installation fee and purchase stock in NTTPC, dependents are allowed the service for only the \$30 installation fee and a regular monthly charge.

Without Fault. The Marines at the telephone exchange, SSgt. Stanley, and his two assistants, Sgt. Rudolph Clements and PFC David Robinson, in addition to their regular duties, provide a backstop for the Japanese employees in case of some emergency, such as a mass strike against NTTPC. They are knowledgeable of the equipment and can operate it temporarily by themselves if the need arises. In the event of a power failure, they have at their disposal a double back-up system; a diesel-powered generator and enough battery power to keep the telephones operating for another 100 hrs.

As the dependency on the telephone spirals upward, so has the sophistication of its operation. Iwakuni's telephone Marines and Japanese employees have all the skill to keep the local telephone system operating at peak effectiveness, insuring that that common household and business desk decoration will continue to function without fault, as indeed everyone has come to expect it will.



MAINTENANCE MAN CHECKING LINES
The equipment was in use before the war.



DIRECTORY CLERK MIYOKO KAMEI
Without it many wouldn't be able to adjust.