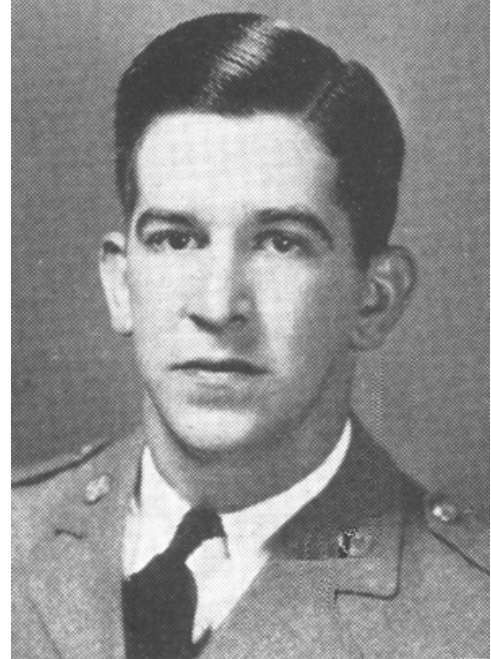


Bold and Courageous

Joseph Bean Palmer, unlike so many of the young men in his Class of 1939, was not in the advanced ROTC program. He had no aspiration of earning an Army commission or pursuing a career in the military. Palmer, an animal husbandry major from Timmonsville, confined his campus activities to his studies and membership in the Animal Husbandry Club. A senior private, he was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment of the Cadet Brigade.

After graduation, Palmer took a position with the United Fruit Company, later known as Chiquita. The company controlled much of the fruit business in Central America and imported its produce into the United States. Palmer worked for the company in Guatemala.



When America was forced into World War II, Palmer enlisted as a Marine Corps private. He was assigned to the 4th Marine Division which was being formed at Camp Pendleton, California from Marine units on both the east and west coasts. The 4th Marine Division was activated in August 1943. It sailed into the Pacific in January 1944, its first objective the Japanese-held island of Kwajalein. After seizing that island, the division was pulled back to Hawaii to rest, refit, and retrain. Through the spring, the division trained to master the specialized techniques of amphibious warfare, staging practice landings from its headquarters at Kahului.

In June, the 4th Marine Division set sail as part of Operation Forager, the conquest of the Mariana Islands in the Central Pacific. Fifty-six attack transports loaded with Marines and Army units and twenty cargo ships were escorted by the four carrier task forces of the US Fifth Fleet under the command of Admiral Raymond Spruance.



Marines head toward Saipan's beaches, June 15, 1944.

At 0700 on June 15, the Marines began to pull out of their transport ships, bound for Saipan aboard amtracs, amphibious tractors that could carry the Marines directly up onto the beach. As the amtracs assembled for their run to the shore, fighter planes from eight escort carriers zoomed overhead to strike targets on the island. For thirty minutes, the aircraft

dipped and dove, fired and bombed before heading back to their carriers. With one hour to go until the Marines landed, the big guns of the escorting warships, led by USS *California* and USS *Tennessee*, both Pearl Harbor survivors, opened fire on the island.

Marines from the 4th Division landed on Yellow and Blue beaches and were immediately met with intense Japanese fire ranging from rifle and machine gun to mortar and artillery. Despite the Japanese resistance, by nightfall, six Marine regiments were on shore, their lines enclosing the southwest corner of Saipan.

As the Marines battled to seize control of Aslito airfield on June 17, First Lieutenant Palmer's company attacked a strategic hill held by the Japanese. When Palmer's company commander was killed and his second-in-command seriously wounded, Palmer advanced under an intense enemy barrage to direct the company and fire from supporting tanks. In the fight, Palmer was mortally wounded. His "bold and courageous" leadership resulted in the posthumous award of the Silver Star. The Marines would win the fight for the airfield and for Saipan, as well as Guam and Tinian, also in the Marianas chain. These three islands would comprise the largest airbase complex in the world, facilities from which the Army Air Force would mount its deadly firebombing campaign against Japan's cities.

In addition to the Silver Star, Palmer was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his mother and three brothers, one of whom was serving in the Navy. First Lieutenant Palmer was buried in the 4th Marine Division Cemetery on Saipan. After the war, his body was returned to the United States and buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

