



The ASC History Newsletter

Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients

This
MONTH in
military
history ...

- 1675: King Philip's War began
- 1775: Battle of Breed's Hill
- 1778: French declared war on England
- 1863: Vicksburg surrendered
- 1863: Gettysburg
- 1876: Battle of Little Big Horn
- 1898: Marines landed at Guantanamo Bay
- 1917: American Expeditionary Force arrived in France
- 1918: Belleau Woods
- 1934: Night of the Long Knives
- 1941: Operation Barbarossa
- 1943: Operation Husky
- 1944: "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot"
- 1950: Korean War began
- 1952: Airstrike against Yalu River hydroelectric plants
- 1966: Hanoi bombed for the 1st time
- 1976: 1st women enrolled at West Point
- 2006: The Second Battle of Ramadi

During World War II, the campaign to capture the Marianas Islands was of the highest strategic importance to the Allied war effort. When secure, the Japanese home islands would be within operational range of the Army Air Force's heavy bombers and fighter escorts. From June to August 1944, U.S. Marines and soldiers would wrestle these islands from the Japanese defenders, at a very high cost.

In the final days of the battle for Guam, "On the 3rd (August 1944), the disposition of American forces, the terrain, and the road net combined to bring the 3rd Marine Division into a head-on clash with the enemy deployed near Finegayan, guarding the western approaches to the final Japanese stronghold".

As in all battles, there comes a time for a final push to decide its outcome. The task of eliminating the remaining Japanese resistance on the northern part of the island fell to Private First Class Peter Witek and the

1st Battalion, 9th Marines.

During the battle, "when his rifle platoon was halted by heavy surprise fire from well-camouflaged enemy positions, Pfc. Witek daringly remained standing to fire a full magazine from his automatic at point-blank range into a depression housing Japanese troops, killing eight of the enemy and enabling the greater part of his platoon to take cover. During his platoon's withdrawal for consolidation of lines, he remained to safeguard a severely wounded comrade, courageously returning the enemy's fire until the arrival of stretcher bearers, and then covering the evacuation by sustained fire as he moved backward toward his own lines. With his platoon again pinned down by a hostile machine gun, Pfc. Witek, on his own initiative, moved forward boldly to the reinforcing tanks and infantry, alternately throwing hand grenades



and firing as he advanced to within five to ten yards of the enemy position, and destroying the hostile machine gun emplacement and an additional eight Japanese before he himself was struck down by an enemy rifleman".

Source:
"History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II, Volume 3" by Henry I. Shaw

Buried at the Rock Island National Cemetery

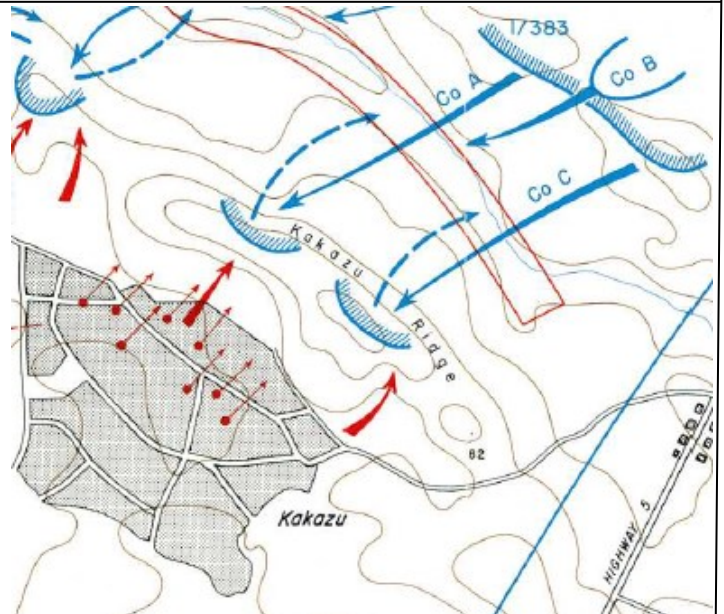
Dawn of Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945, disclosed an American fleet of 1,300 ships in the waters adjacent to Okinawa, poised for invasion. The reduction of the island was the last step before an invasion of the Japanese home islands could be contemplated.

The Japanese defenders chose not to contest the invasion on the beaches, but rather anchored their main defensive lines in the mountainous southern part of the island. The strongest and most infamous being the Shuri line. However, before the Shuri line could be attacked, the initial defenses on the Kakazu ridge had to be breached.

The Japanese-held area in front of the 383rd Infantry (96th Infantry Division) offered the enemy an ideal combination of defensive features. A deep moat, a hill studded with natural and man-made positions and a cluster of thick-walled buildings behind the hill. Into this, the 1st Battalion, 383rd Infantry advanced.

Private First Class Edward J. Moskala, Company C, 1st Battalion was in the leading element when grenade explosions, concentrated machine gun and mortar fire halted the unit's attack on Kakazu Ridge. His citation read: "With utter disregard for his personal safety, he charged forty yards through withering, grazing fire and wiped out two machine gun nests

with well-aimed grenades and deadly accurate fire from his automatic rifle. When strong counterattacks and fierce enemy resistance from other positions forced his company to withdraw, he voluntarily remained behind with eight others to cover the maneuver. Fighting from a critically dangerous position for three hours, he killed more than twenty-five Japanese before following his surviving companions through screening smoke down the face of the ridge to a gorge where it was discovered that one of the group had been left behind, wounded. Unhesitatingly, Pfc. Moskala climbed the bullet-swept slope to assist in the rescue, and upon returning to lower ground, volunteered to protect other wounded while the bulk of the troops quickly took up more favorable positions. He had saved another casualty and killed four enemy infiltrators when he was struck and mortally wounded himself while aiding another disabled soldier.



Private First Class Edward J. Moskala and Private First Class Peter Witek are buried in Section E, Graves 293 and 72 respectively. Section E is located southwest of the cemetery's flagpole. If you are having problems finding their final resting place, the main administrative building for the cemetery has a grave locator to aid in your search. The National Cemetery's website is: <http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/rockisland.asp>

Source:
"Okinawa: The Last Battle", by Roy E. Appleman