

Excerpts about Lt. Col. Joseph P. McCaffery, USMC, from *Ribbon and a Star* by John Monks, Jr. and from *FROM MAKIN TO BOUGAINVILLE: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* by Major Jon T Hoffman, USMCR

When a battalion had lost its commander on Guadalcanal "Little Joe" (McCaffery) then a major had been there to take over and assume command. **He had led them through the darkness and brought them safely out.**

He had been spot-promoted to a lieutenant colonel for his **brilliant leadership**. In the Munda-Rendova campaign he had made the long 15-mile trek through a mangrove swamp with the Raiders and wiped out a Japanese garrison, which had been caught completely by surprise. Back in New Zealand, he had flown out to take command of another new outfit, the Second Raider.

A great wit, a marvelous story-teller, a great companion, and an inspiring man, he was adored by all.

Bougainville in the South Pacific, Nov. 1, 1943:

For this operation, the 2d and 3d Raider Battalions were organized as the 2d Raider Regiment, with Shapley in command. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph P. McCaffery took over the 2d Raider Battalion. Because of insufficient shipping, the initial landing consisted of just two regiments of the 3d Marine Division, reinforced by the raiders and the 3d Defense Battalion. The remainder of the Marines and the Army's 37th Division would follow at a later time.

On 1 November, the 3d and 9th Marines, assisted by the 2d Raider Battalion, seized a swath of the coast from Cape Torokina to the northwest. At the same time, the 3d Raider Battalion (less Company M) assaulted Puruata Island off Cape Torokina. Japanese defenses in the landing area consisted of a single company supported by a 75mm gun. One platoon occupied Puruata and a squad held Torokina Island, while the rest of the Japanese infantry and the gun were dug in on the cape itself.

The small Japanese force gave a good account of itself. The 75mm gun enfiladed the eastern landing beaches, while machine guns on the two small islands and the cape placed the approaches to this area in a cross fire. The result was havoc among the initial right flank assault waves, which landed in considerable disorder.

The 2d Raider Battalion, landing just to the left of Owens' battalion, suffered from the gun, and from mortar and machine gun fire raking the beach. **McCaffery succeeded in reorganizing his force on the beach and launching an**

attack that swept away the enemy defenses, but he fell mortally wounded in the process:

The Second Raider Battalion had landed to the left of the First Battalion. This was another hot spot with well-constructed bunkers. Lt. Col. Joseph P. McCaffery, the commanding officer, had gone in with the first wave.



The Colonel and his party had cleared the beach and were moving along the edge of the swamp into position. Suddenly the advance was held up by machine-gun fire from a well-concealed bunker just off the beach.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Colonel.

"There's a machine-gun down there covering the beach!" replied a Marine who had worked his way back to the group.

"Then we've got to knock it out. Got to keep moving. Let's go!"

The Colonel and his headquarters party started forward. A few moments later there was a burst of machine gun fire; four rounds struck the Colonel in the chest.

A corpsman went to work immediately, and the Battalion surgeon rushed to his aid. Everything was done to check the bleeding and get the Colonel into condition to be rushed back to the ship. Since a chest wound of his magnitude is always fatal, everyone near him worked frantically.

The Colonel was carefully carried to a landing boat – still conscious, his pain dulled by morphine. He gave his last instructions to his Executive Officer and turned over his command.

The landing boat raced back to the transport, and there the Colonel was rushed to the sick bay. Three doctors worked rapidly and with great care to replace the tremendous loss of blood. But four bullets through the lungs are just too many, and the Catholic Chaplain was summoned. Still conscious but rapidly growing weaker, the Colonel prayed with the good father. When the last rites were finished, the great Marine smiled up at the Chaplain and whispered: "Well—it's been a short war..."

That morning the Marine Corps suffered a great loss. "Little Joe" – brilliant officer, kind and loyal friend, magnificent, courageous hero, and, to all who ever met him, talked with him, fought with him, the most wonderful guy. Little Joe had died.