The Pacific War As It Looks To An ETO Veteran

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The Manamans—Most of us with little or no experience in the Pacific are apt to think of the war in the area solely in terms of fear and destruction. We forget the real, underlying beauty that the islands possess. While it is true that thousands of our men are still perishing under firing under miserable conditions, generally speaking the Pacific war is moving out of the jungles and small islands towards the larger land bases.

This is bringing about changes which occasionally surprise even the men who have been in this theater for many months. The marine coming up from the Solomon Islands finds it hard to adjust himself to the open countryside of Okinawa. An open country—fields, woods, and swamps—where you can just about see the sky. Leyte could hardly believe his eyes when he first dug a foxhole more than a foot and a half deep on Okinawa and didn’t run into water. Remembering the days in the South Pacific, both marines and infantrymen landed on Okinawa with only a poncho. They found that a half-blanker would come in handy.

There are differences in the near areas, too. For instance, a man in Okinawa may not be as enthusiastic about the guns as he is in a crater, but he can afford to get a new one. The Okinawan is now working at the depot field on Guam who has stripped taking supplies, something he was always being reminded about on Guadalcanal. While a state-of-the-art operator at Ulihi works in the stuffy white earol, on Okinawa he digs in honest-to-God dirt and clay.

The man from North Africa or Europe might well find the climate in the Pacific better in the long run. The Okinawan climate is more extreme compared with the hotter climates of German and Italian soldiers. The men of an Air Force service group from North Africa might not mind the heat in the Pacific any more than the others they’ve sweated out island from the Mediterranean. The man who fought malaria in Sicily and again in Italy might not be bothered with recurring attacks of Okinawa. There are too many places in the Pacific where there are no jungle or mosquitoes to worry about. The man from North Africa might perhaps be more accustomed to open country and large bodies of land, no matter how barren or cursorily compared with open areas in Europe. We are just beginning to reach them.

Probably the first thing an ETO combat veteran would notice in the Pacific is the relatively short time that divisions fighting the Japs have remained in action. The First Marine and the Seventh Divisions are typical. They landed able to save on Okinawa. Previously the First Marine on Guadalcanal and Leyte. Probably they have been fighting in this theater as any other combat outfit. They’ve had a rough time, but they have also had long combat periods between actions. This was never possible in Europe. The war was always present and the demand on the troops increased constantly. Corrals were relieved in action after a few weeks. Here, given short rests but as soon as their few days were up they returned to the fighting. Combat was continuous and didn’t end until VE-Day.

Relief periods in the Pacific, though, have meant little more than being stuck on some God forsaken island far from anything that resembles Western civilization, an island base servicing a group of groves, given tents and lumber and told to hold these grounds. Building might be still going on six months later when they left for their next assignment.

Yet periods in the ETO may have been short but on occasion they gave a soldier a chance to get completely away from traditional Army life. No matter how wretched and dirty an Italian base has squatted to be at least it was a change. In Europe bases were always the same. You could see the same sights, visit the same places, watch the same spots to gather in. Exciting entertainment was always going to the nearest naval base for a good meal.

The “relief” combat soldier isn’t the only one who is being toasted by this monotony. It characterizes the life of every man in the Pacific. In Europe combat units live in the comparative luxury of towns and cities behind the lines. There is little to amuse away in Pacific behind-the-lines life. Freedom, of course, is known to GIs the same as to any other soldier, wherever he is. It is France and Italy they call it. ETO aren’t out here, the expression is “E-T-O.” There is little actual difference between the舒服 of Army life in Italy or on Kwajalein or Canton Island except in the amount of it. In the Pacific, there is no escape from places like Kwajalein. Europe has diversions.

Feeling the GI in Pacific island “paradise” and making inevitable his homework is a factor which was completely absent in Europe. It is not as

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