

Iron County Men Fight Fierce Battles at Okinawa

by Jay M. Jones



The U.S. Navy destroyer USS Hugh W. Hadley (DD-774) in the outer harbour of San Pedro, California on 11 December 1944. Cedar City native Douglas Manning served on this ship during a massive kamikaze attack on 11 May 1945 near Okinawa. Official U. S. Navy Photo.

Seventy-five years ago World War II was winding down. This is the eighth article in a series highlighting contributions of people from Iron County to the war effort. This article focuses on experiences of Iron County servicemen in the battle of Okinawa.

Commencing at about 8 a.m. on May 11, 1945, one of the largest kamikaze attacks in World War II took place off the coast of Okinawa.

Douglas Manning of Cedar City was on the crew of the destroyer USS Hadley, stationed at a radar picket post northeast of Okinawa. The radar on the Hadley picked up five waves totaling 150 planes flying from the Japanese island of Kyushu toward Okinawa.

U. S. planes intercepted and shot down between 40 and 50 of the kamikaze planes. Under heavy attack the Hadley shot down an additional 23 planes, which was the largest total by a single ship in a single engagement during the war.

Another destroyer stationed nearby, the USS Evans, shot down an additional 19 aircraft. Other U. S. warships in the vicinity destroyed about 10 more.

Both the Hadley and the Evans were hit by multiple kamikaze planes and extensively damaged. On the Hadley, about 30 crew members were killed instantly, with over 100 others injured. Manning escaped unhurt.

Some of the kamikaze planes continued further on and inflicted heavy damage to other US Navy vessels supporting the invasion of Okinawa, including the aircraft carrier USS Bunker Hill.

For its action, the USS Hadley was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

The island of Okinawa was the site of one of the fiercest battles in the Pacific. Located about 300 miles south of the Japanese island of Kyushu, capturing the airfields of Okinawa would be of great strategic value to the American war effort.

After a lightly contested landing on Okinawa on April 1, 1945, the U. S. ground forces found that the Japanese had dug into formidable defenses. Over 12,500 American soldiers would lose their lives in the coming three months.

M. Arthur Peterson, 28, of Parowan was reported killed in action on May 25, 1945 at Okinawa.

In his last letter to his mother written on May 16, Arthur stated that he had plenty of points to get out of the Army but that there were other men in his outfit with more, so he didn't know when his turn would come. He had completed nearly 38 months of overseas duty when he died.

Brian Pendleton, a 1944 graduate of Parowan High School, was killed in action on Okinawa on June 17, 1945.

Private Pendleton joined the Marines shortly after graduation, and was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion of the 22nd Regiment in the 6th Marine Division. He went ashore on Okinawa on April 1, the day the invasion began. His division helped clean out the northern end of the island, then continued battle on the southern end.

In a letter to his parents written a few days before his death, he stated that he had been on Okinawa seventy-five days and at that time had been on the front line for thirty consecutive days and nights, sleeping in foxholes.

Henry Zuniga from the Indian colony in Cedar City was seriously wounded in battle on Okinawa on April 12. As a member of the infantry, Henry saw much action in the Pacific war zone.

Bayne Hunter of Cedar City, an aviation machinist mate on board the USS New Mexico was wounded by shrapnel on May 12. The Iron County Record reported that he was recovering rapidly.

Corporal Floyd Stephens, serving with a field artillery unit, received serious wounds just above his heart on June 29. A blood transfusion given just 10 minutes after he was wounded apparently saved his life.

Private James Halcomb, a 19-year old infantryman from Cedar City was awarded the Purple Heart Medal for wounds sustained at Okinawa while serving with the Seventh Infantry Division.

Other servicemen from Iron County that served at Okinawa include Lyle Barton, Alma Chamberlain, Lamont Hunter, Clair Lowder, Ellis Mosdell, Mack Mulliner, Carroll Olds, Humbert Rosenberg and Durrel Woolsey.

In addition to the 12,500 American servicemen killed in action at Okinawa, approximately 70,000 were wounded.

Japanese military deaths were estimated at 110,000. Estimates of civilian deaths ranged from 30,000 to 100,000. (The civilian population was estimated at 300,000 prior to the invasion.)

In some cases the Japanese used civilians as human shields, in other cases they were caught in crossfire. Starvation and disease took a heavy toll. Near the end, Japanese troops provided grenades to civilians and encouraged mass civilian suicide.

After securing the island of Okinawa, the U. S. and Allied military forces began preparations to attack the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, estimated to begin about October 1945. Knowing the brutal results from the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the planned invasion of Kyushu was expected to be a long nightmare.

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