

Robert Earl Hatley, T-41

24 October 1922 – 30 October 1968

(aged 46)



MEMPHIAN AND THREE OTHERS RETURN FROM 'DEAD' IN PACIFIC BOUGAINVILLE, Jan. 4 - (Delayed) - Four soldiers, members of an Army patrol from which they became separated, returned to their base 24 hours after they had been given up for lost.

Venturing 2,000 yards beyond the front lines, they had spent a sleepless night on the fringe of a strong Japanese bivouac area.

One of them Pvt. Russell W. Feldpausch, 19, of Langsing MI, escaped by floating down the swift Torokina River.

Another Pvt. Clyde L. Dunn, 25, Lafayette CO, killed five Japanese, four of them in one group. The men told Sergeant James E. Hague, of CT, a Marine combat correspondent that they probably killed three others.

The other who escaped were Corporal Charles A. Freschette, 22, of Cavalier ND. and Pfc. Robert E. Hatley, 21, the Memphian. A fifth member of their group is missing.

The five men became separated from a patrol north of the Empress Augusta beachhead when the patrol struck an enemy bivouac area, killing seven Japs and withdrew.

Hatley and Dunn took shelter in a deep hole with Freschette near by. Feldpausch and the fifth man were farther up the trail.

"I lay on my stomach, stretched over my radio from 4 p.m. until 3 p.m. the next day," Hatley said. He said "I didn't sleep a wink, or turn over once. I thought the cramps were killing me.

"There was one sniper at my left. He fired at me all afternoon. So close I could hear him open and close his bolt."

Enemy rifle fire ceased at nightfall but the Nipponese continued to throw grenades and fire mortar shells. During the night they tapped out signals on rifle butts, chatted in chorus and yelled at the Americans. At daybreak Hatley and Dunn saw four enemy soldiers approaching.

"One was so close he stepped over my leg, but I let all four get by," said Dunn." Then I whistled softly."

GOT ALL FOUR

"The first one turned around and they all bunched up like a railroad train. I stood up and got three of them. The fourth spun around and I blew the back of his head off."

Dunn's friends vouched for his account. Half an hour later, Dunn killed a fifth Japanese coming down the trail.

In the afternoon Freschette, Hatley, and Dunn escaped toward the river, set up their radio and got directions which enabled them to return to their lines about 6 p.m.

Feldpausch said that after an agonizing night he and companion saw four Japanese and possibly killed three. The fourth ran away. The two soldiers became separated. Feldpausch told Hague.

"I crawled to the river, saw five or six Japs creeping up on me and ran like hell through the swamp. I was so tired I could hardly walk when I reached the river and jumped in. My clothes got heavy so I took them off. I'd get out of the water and rest and then go downstream again. About 5 o'clock some Marines saw me and took me to their camp."

Private Hatley is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Troy L Hatley of 1335 Snowden. A graduate of Tech High, he was employed at Sears Roebuck & Company before he entered service in December 1942.

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