

# **Poems for My Woofie**

**The Story of Lt. Wilfred V. Michaud, 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division**

The Honors Program  
Senior Capstone Project  
Student's Name: Allison Orr  
Faculty Sponsor: Mary Prescott  
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**ABSTRACT**

My senior capstone project is the creation of a book of investigative poetry. The subject of the work is my grandfather, Wilfred V. Michaud. He was a lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps during World War II. The poetry addresses the history of Michaud's battalion and the battles it fought, as well as personal stories of Michaud's life and experience in the service. Several secondary sources were used to gain historical context for the poetry. Additionally, primary sources were used to provide information about Michaud's personal experiences. The combination of primary and secondary sources established the necessary background and inspiration for the project.

## **FINAL REPORT**

### Introduction

I am an actuarial mathematics major writing a book of poetry about World War II. My capstone is an unlikely combination to say the least. Despite the peculiarity of it, my project has been an eye-opening journey not only into the areas of poetry and World War II history, but also into myself. The opportunity to explore different subjects and challenge myself through my Senior Honors Capstone is one that I will never regret taking.

When searching for a topic of this long-term project, I first stayed close to home, looking for subjects within my area of study, mathematics. I knew a capstone in this field would suffice, but I also knew it was not something that I would look forward to working on throughout the coming semesters. Furthermore, as an actuary I will be using math in my daily work for the rest of my career. To me, completing a capstone was a chance to do something I love or take a risk I might not be able to in the future, not simply another item to check off my to-do list. This project was my chance to do something different, stretch my abilities, and think in new ways. When I realized this, I knew a project in my major was not right for me.

Now knowing what I did not want to do, I started thinking about what I did want to do. I thought about what other subjects interested me and what topic could keep me excited over the course of the project. This led me to my grandfather. Unfortunately, my grandfather passed away before I was born, robbing me of a relationship with him. However, I was aware that he fought as a marine in World War II and was awarded the Navy Cross for his service. Moreover, I had always enjoyed learning about history, specifically military history. Understanding how relationships around the world fed into times of conflict and how these episodes influenced the course of history for years to come had intrigued me in the past. Additionally, World War II was of specific interest to me because of its timeliness and the global impacts it has had in the last 70 years. With a longing to know a man I would never meet, coupled with a personal curiosity in World War II history, it was clear that having my grandfather as the subject of my capstone was the perfect solution.

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At this point, I had a topic, but how would this topic translate into a tangible project? It was obvious to me that the project would have to be creative, giving me a chance to tell my grandfather's story. I have always valued creative arts, dabbling in music and enjoying writing throughout my academic career, but I am by no means an expert in the area. This lack of expertise did cause hesitation initially, but because I was so passionate about the topic I knew I could find a way to make my capstone work. I considered different kinds of art including writing, film, and music. I eventually landed on poetry. Poetry seemed like a fitting medium for my grandfather's story because it would allow me to focus on different aspects of his life, while still giving each the attention it deserved. Additionally, I had always enjoyed reading and writing poetry in my past English classes. And so it was decided, my capstone would be a book of poetry about my grandfather.

Choosing a capstone focused in areas that I was somewhat unfamiliar with would certainly pose a challenge. I was going to need to put in extra effort to learn about the fundamentals of poetry, cultivate a writing process, research the history of the pertinent battles, and become an expert on my grandfather's life. It would most definitely be a difficult undertaking, but I was going to be working on a project that I was truly invested in and that would culminate into something tangible that I could be proud of and hold on to. That is what motivated me. That is why I am actuarial mathematics major writing a book of poetry about World War II for my Senior Honors Capstone.

### Writing Process

Once I had chosen a topic, I turned to researching. I needed to consult both primary and secondary sources to learn about my topic. The primary sources would provide historical context of my grandfather's story, giving me the necessary information about the specifics of his battalion's and the battle's background. Contrarily, the secondary sources would be used to research my grandfather's personal experiences as a member of the United States Marine Corps. Together, these sources would build my expertise of the subject which I would later be writing poetry about. More information on the sources used to gain expertise in my topic can be found in the historical literature review.

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After researching my topic and writing the necessary literature review, the creative portion of the project came into play. Coming into the capstone as someone that was essentially new to poetry, I needed to read before I could write. I read poetry suggested by the capstone writing coach, Kristen Park, my advisor, Mary Prescott, and my editorial reviewer, Thomas Chandler. These works included *Selected Poems: Gay Chaps at the Bar* by Gwendolyn Brooks, *Native Guard Poems* by Natasha Tretheway, *Thomas and Beulah* by Rita Dove, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-Handed Poems* by Michael Ondaatje, and *A Confederate General from Big Sur* by Richard Brautigan. While reading these suggested works, I did not try to focus on any one aspect of the writing, rather I simply tried to let the art of poetry sink in by noticing different forms, styles, setups, word choices, and topics. I used this time to enjoy what I was reading and become excited about writing poetry. This portion of my capstone was a time for expanding my poetic knowledge as opposed to finding techniques for writing and locking myself into them. Though this step in the process of my project did not produce any direct results, it was critical for my development as a reader and writer of poetry.

Now that I had read poetry and immersed myself in the art, it was time to write. The first stage of my writing process consisted of discovering the topics I wanted to write about. I envisioned the final book of poems capturing several different moments in my grandfather's life, not just focusing on his military career. As a result, I wanted to start my writing by having a clear idea of what experiences I would make my poems about. I came up with twelve poem topics: Wilfred's brother who was killed in action, Wilfred's wife who served as a code breaker in the United States Navy, Wilfred's heart problems, haikus describing the Japanese forces, a recollection of the Battle of Gavutu, the remainder of the Guadalcanal campaign, the act of honor that earned Wilfred the Navy Cross, the Navy Cross itself, Wilfred's young adulthood as a marine, post-traumatic stress disorder, Wilfred's life outside of the service, and my journey through the capstone. I felt that these dozen subjects encompassed my grandfather's entire life well and showed the many different dimensions of him.

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Next, I began writing my poems. For me, writing poetry was a very systematic process. I suppose this structure was a product of my mathematical tendencies finding their way into my creative processes. I set aside time on weeknights between 8 pm and 10 pm to write poetry. I started writing by picking my favorite of the remaining topics, usually a subject I had already thought of an idea for in passing, either in the form of a line or the setup of the poem. I would begin with the broad topic from my list and then try to describe the details of the event from my grandfather's point of view. Once I was satisfied with a draft, I would email the poem to my editorial review, Thomas Chandler. Professor Chandler would then email me with feedback on the draft and possible suggestions for improvement. Email was our method of communication because the writing portion of my capstone occurred over the summer and we were unable to meet in person. This form of feedback may seem like an obstacle to some, but because of our diligence, Professor Chandler and I were able to correspond frequently and overcome this obstacle. After a few correspondence and several drafts, a poem was deemed "complete". I put the word complete in quotations because poetry is never truly finished. Something more can always be done to improve a poem, perhaps a change of word choice or tweaking of the form. However, because we were on a schedule I needed to finish each poem. I would move on to another topic once I had completed a poem. By not writing several different poems at once, I was able to give each topic the attention it deserved and stay organized. The twelve poems, each accompanied by a paragraph explaining their significance, were finished over the summer.

### Literature Review

As mentioned early, before I started writing poems, I read them. The purpose of reading poetry was to become immersed in the art form while discovering different writing styles and get excited about writing. During this time, I also tried to become influenced and inspired by some of what I was reading. However, as I read, I found inspiration was hard to force. I enjoyed reading other poets, but had a hard time taking lessons from their work and directly applying it to mine. I think part of this difficulty was born from my inexperience with poetry. I could read and enjoy a poem, but because I had not studied the topic I could not evaluate the

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work from a literary standpoint. Though this posed an obstacle to finding influence and inspiration from the poetry I was reading, I believed it allowed me to develop as a poet myself more freely. Because I was not an expert in poetics, I could look at a poem without worrying about specific writing techniques or the like. The same could be said about my writing. I was not restricted by needing to fulfill certain poetic requirements, rather I wrote in order to tell Wilfred's story in the ways I felt were best.

In terms of specific inspiration, instead of looking to certain poets I turned to my topic. My grandfather's story is what fueled my entire capstone journey. In the final book, you will notice that each poem is accompanied by an image. Most of the images come from my family's collection. Many times when beginning to write a poem, I started with a broad topic and then chose the image that represented that topic. One activity I often did to kick start my writing was to study the image and create a story from it. The story would be about the broader topic chosen, but I would fill in the details. This story would then be translated into a poem, focusing on the emotions of the narrative.

Another technique I used during my process was free writing. I would simply start writing notes about the specific topic I had chosen, not worrying about forming complete ideas, only trying to get my thoughts written down. From there, I would analyze my notes looking for possible themes that could connect my fragmented ideas into a single, coherent subject. Once the overarching message was found, I would then piece my notes back together like puzzle to create a poem.

The last significant method I used for writing was using form to guide my topic. For example, the poem written about Wilfred's wife is written as a letter. I felt this was a fitting form for the topic. The same technique was used for the haikus. For these poems, once a form was decided I then wrote the poem on the given topic with the setup restrictions.

Overall, my writing style and inspiration was not taken from any specific poems or poets. Instead, my inexperience allowed me to take my poetry in any direction I wanted to go. I am sure during my writing I used techniques and had a similar style to other poets in some way.



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However, because I have not studied poetics formally I did not use certain methods or literary devices as a result of reading poetry. Though my inexperience may have limited me in certain aspects of the project, it was an asset in the writing process because I was not restricted by the conventions of the subject and was able to develop as a poet without being bound by expectation.

Writing Choices

While I was writing, my style formed naturally. Due to my strategy of starting with a large topic and describing the details from my grandfather's point of view, many of my poems took on a narrative tone, telling a story, and were free verse with no set metrical pattern or rhyme scheme. For me, telling the story of my grandfather was the main purpose of my capstone. Using a narrative tone and writing in free verse allowed me to focus on this story without being restricted by form and style rules. One of my poetic concerns that did restrict me in some ways was symmetry. Being a mathematical person, I find symmetry to be important. Symmetry in poems helps to keep the writer organized and the reader on track. Symmetry is also visually appealing. As a result, a narrative tone, free verse, and symmetry are aspects of my writing style that can be seen in my poetry.

As the summer went on and I had written a few poems, I opened up to experimenting with different forms and style. I tried the different formats, such as haikus and letters. I also became less concerned with symmetry. I still focused on having my poems come full-circle, leaving the reader with closure on the topic. However, I was not as obsessed with word repetition or perfectly aligned stanzas. These are some of the more mechanical developments to my writing style over the course of my project.

There are also thematic elements that can be seen throughout my writing. One of these elements is the accessibility of my poetry. As someone who is not a trained poet, I wanted to create art that all readers could enjoy, whether they had been studying poetry all of their life or they had just read their very first poem. In order to make my poetry accessible, I focused on simple word choice and appealing to the reader's emotions. Additionally, most of my

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poems are characterized by a moment of understanding at the conclusion. This feature helps the reader have the same understanding of the important event depicted by the poem that Wilfred had in his life. These factors make my poetry approachable to all readers and allow them to understand and relate to each piece.

Another artistic choice made was the setup of the book itself. The book contains twelve poems, each accompanied by an image and paragraph of prose. This style is based on a chapbook, a book consisting of between 8 and 24 single folded pages with illustrations. The image adds another dimension to the book by aiding the reader in the visualization of the poem's topic. The prose is included to clarify the background of the poem and add any necessary details of the subject that are not included in the piece. As mentioned earlier, I chose to focus on twelve poems because this number of pieces was enough to cover the significant aspects of Wilfred's life that I wanted to, but not so many that it detracted from the importance of each topic. With these concerns in mind, a chapbook containing twelve poems, twelve images, and twelve paragraphs became the final product of my capstone.

### Reflection

My Senior Honors Capstone has been an incredible learning opportunity for me. The project provided me with the chance to learn more about myself, my grandfather, history, and poetry. Furthermore, I learned lessons about life in general. This portion of my essay discusses some of the key takeaways from my nearly two-year capstone journey.

The most important lesson I learned about poetry through my project dealt with impermanence. After completing a few poems, getting feedback along the way, and stumbling through each one, I quickly caught on to how the successes and failures a poet has with each attempt at writing do not last. Every time you begin a poem you start over. What worked in your last poem will not work again. You may learn a few techniques and taboos as you go along, but each piece is largely built from nothing. This impermanence can be good and bad. It is good because this gives writers the freedom to create anything without being tied down by what they have created in the past. It is bad because it creates a continuous challenge for a

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poet with each piece. Once I came to terms with the impermanence of poetry, I focused on the opportunity it provided rather than the obstacles it produced.

Another one of my major takeaways was the creation of a grandfather. This one does sound odd, but I will explain. Before I began my capstone, I knew very little about Woofie. In fact, my knowledge of him was limited to knowing he was in the United States Marine Corps and fought in the Pacific during World War II. By researching the battles, looking through his photos, and writing poetry about his life, I created a persona of Wilfred Michaud all for myself. Of course everything I read and wrote was based on fact, but there were places where I had to imagine how Wilfred would feel about something or what he might say in a certain situation. This is where I had to be creative and in the process I created a grandfather for myself in place of the man I will unfortunately never meet.

Furthermore, I was able to discover what it means to be a poet at least to myself. For me, being a poet is not about your educational background or training. If this were the case, there is no way I could consider myself, an actuarial mathematics major with no legitimate poetry experience, a poet. Being a poet is about a person's need to write. A poem is simply a written expression of something that needed to be said, no matter the subject of the work, the time of day it was written, or the circumstances in which the idea came to the writer. Moreover, if you wrote a poem, then you are a poet. You may not be a poet for life, but you were in the instance you wrote the piece. It is certain that some people will disagree with this definition wholeheartedly, but that is okay. That is my definition though. I would not consider myself a poet for all time, but for the period of my capstone I was. I had a story I felt I had to write about. I am sure I will have this need again later in my life. I will be a poet again then. Anyone can be a poet, it only requires the need to write.

The final lesson I want to discuss is taking risks. By embarking on a project that involved two areas of study I was relatively unfamiliar with, one could definitely say I took a risk. It was certainly challenging thinking in new ways in order to research the history and write the poetry. However, I would not choose a different capstone if given the option. Taking the risk provided many obstacles that another project would not, but it also provided opportunity to do

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something different. It is likely that I will never have the chance to write poetry again for any purpose other than recreation. Additionally, through my project I was able to surprise many people including myself. People did not expect my project and often questioned how I was fit to complete it. At times, I doubted my abilities as well. However, when I did complete my capstone it felt that much better to prove that I could do what I had set out to do and it was worth taking the risk. So for those wary of taking a similar risk I would advise you to take it. You will learn a lot, challenge yourself, discover new skills and ways of thinking, and surprise people along the way.

Conclusion

My capstone has been a great experience. I am so pleased with the final results and know Woofie would be too. As I have mentioned, I have learned so much through this project about poetry, history, and myself. I would advise all future capstone students to take the project as an opportunity to do something you love. It is a big commitment, so make it worthwhile and create something you are passionate about and can be proud of.

I would like to thank a few people, without whom this capstone would never have been completed. Firstly, I would like to thank Mary Prescott and Thomas Chandler. Professor Prescott, my advisor, and Professor Chandler, my reviewer, took a chance on me. I am so thankful for the support they have given me to pursue my passion with this project. I would also like to thank Professor Chandler for his specific help with writing the poetry by providing feedback throughout the summer. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Jim Segovis, director of the Bryant Honors Program. I would like to thank him for the opportunity to do such a project and the support to ensure that it was completed and shown to our school's community. Additionally, I would like to thank Kristen Park, the Capstone Writing Coach, for helping to keep my project on track and in line with the program's requirements. Lastly, I would like to thank my mother, Diana Michaud. I would not have been able to complete this project without your support of my project and passion for the topic. Thank you all so much.

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I hope you have enjoyed my capstone journey. I am so glad I could share this story with the world. Now go out, find what ignites your passion, and take the risk.

**HISTORICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

World War II was a defining moment in both United States and World history. Unfortunately, very few of the people directly involved in the military operations and protection of freedom during WWII are still living. It is crucial that we honor these veterans before all of their first-hand accounts of the war are gone. One way this can be done is through writing about their experiences. This is what I intend to do through my capstone. I will be writing a book of poetry about my grandfather, Wilfred Vincent Michaud's, time serving as a paratrooper for the United States Marine Corps. Fictional and non-fictional accounts of numerous events of World War II are present today. My capstone will be a valuable addition to this body of knowledge both because of its artistic nature and its focus on a lesser discussed topic, Marine parachutists.

The topic of World War II history is incredibly broad. As a result, I have narrowed my efforts to my grandfather's experience. The elite division Michaud was a part of played a pivotal role in the Guadalcanal campaign. This campaign itself was a critical turning point of the war in the Pacific. However, without the Paramarines it may not have been the catalyst the United States needed to put Japan on the defensive. Furthermore, Michaud was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroism in the Battle of Gavutu within the Guadalcanal campaign. Because of this, I have focused my research on the establishment of the Marine paratroopers and their role in the Battle of Gavutu. The specificity of my topic severely limited the academic sources available on my topic. In terms of Paramarine history and the events of Battle of Gavutu, there was enough information available through these sources. The same cannot be said about information on my grandfather's experience in the service. This information was gathered through primary sources from my family's collection. Armed with historical context from academic sources and specific experiences from primary source documents, I have become

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more knowledgeable about my topic and more prepared to write poetry that will preserve the story of Wilfred Vincent Michaud.

My research on Marine paratroopers introduced me to *Battalion of the Damned: The 1st Marine Paratroopers at Gavutu and Bloody Ridge, 1942* by James F. Christ, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting: U.S. Marine Corps Parachute Units in World War II* by Jon T. Hoffman, and “The Best and Bravest” by John R. Michaud. Each of these sources worked to describe the development of the short-lived military unit. Hoffman described the early stages of the unit in the most detail, while Christ and Michaud only briefly mentioned the subject. *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting* provided the majority of the division’s background, though *Battalion of the Damned* and “The Best and Bravest” served to support the information.

Before World War II, the United States Marine Corps had never used parachutes (Christ 1). The inception of the Marine parachutists occurred after seeing the German Army’s use of parachutists on the European front (Hoffman 2). The USMC planned for its division to be small, having strict requirements, including rigorous fitness standards, a rank higher than captain, and an exclusion of married volunteers (Hoffman 6). These requests resulted in a more experienced fighting force. As Christ describes it, “The Marine paratroopers had a distinct degree of professionalism and efficiency that had no peer in the U.S. arsenal” (6). However, extra pay, the promise of action, and the excitement of a new type of fighting did entice some younger soldiers (Hoffman 6).

The U.S. Marine Corps began training parachutists in October of 1940 (Hoffman 2). Training occurred in Lakehurst, New Jersey where the first class of parachutists graduated in 1941 (Hoffman 6). In order to complete training, each Marine needed to complete ten jumps (Hoffman 7). Many did not complete the program (Hoffman 7). Most of the first class graduates remained at the Lakehurst training site and were not deployed (Hoffman 7). The training program developed as new volunteers joined, including the introduction of tactical training (Hoffman 7). In addition to the well-rounded training, locations expanded to New River, North Carolina, San Diego, California, as well as Quantico, Virginia (Christ 1; Hoffman 2). Wilfred graduated in the 4th class trained at the Quantico site under Captain

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Mercellus J. Howard on May 28th, 1941 (J. Michaud 6; Hoffman 2). Ironically, the Paramarines never deploy their parachutes in battle despite their training (Jersey 145).

When it came time to deploy the Paramarines, June 1942, the two battalions consisted of 500 men, only 320 of which would participate in the Guadalcanal campaign (Christ 6). The USMC had projected having 700 paratroopers (Christ 6). With the program being in its infancy, it did not get the necessary attention in terms of manpower or adequate supplies (Hoffman 4). This theme of under preparedness played a key role throughout the lifetime of the Marine parachutists.

The next topic that required historical research was the Battle of Gavutu. Information about the event was found in *Battalion of the Damned: The 1st Marine Paratroopers at Gavutu and Bloody Ridge, 1942* by James F. Christ, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting: U.S. Marine Corps Parachute Units in World War II* by Jon T. Hoffman, *Hell's Islands: The Untold Story of Guadalcanal* by Stanley Coleman Jersey, and "The Best and Bravest" by John R. Michaud. Christ and Hoffman provided the most detailed accounts of the battle because the scope of their books focus on the role of the Paramarines explicitly. Conversely, Jersey provides a more succinct account of the event specific to the Marine parachutists because his book discussed multiple Marine divisions' parts in the Guadalcanal campaign. Finally, J. Michaud's dissertation provided a unique perspective of the Battle of Gavutu because he offered details of the event as well as Wilfred Michaud's story.

Up until 1942, the Japanese had not been on the defensive in World War II. The Battle of Midway in early June was the first Japanese defeat and a major turning point in the war (Christ xiii). The Marines were sent to the islands of Guadalcanal because they were the sites of newly constructed Japanese airfields and were located near Australia, an ally of the United States (Christ 1). At this time in World War II, most of the U.S. troops were stationed in Europe and Africa (Christ xiii). Because of this, the United States military turned to the Marines, including the parachutists, to fight the war in the Pacific despite their relatively small numbers and inexperience in combat.

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The 1st Marine division was sent to New Zealand in April 1942 under the command of General Alexander Vandegrift (Christ xiv). Two ships carried the men, the USS Jon Erikson and the USS Mizar (Christ 13). Christ and Jersey detail the adversities of the men aboard the USS Erikson as they endured a grueling journey across the Pacific. The ships refrigerators had broken, causing all of the food to spoil (Christ 13). Jersey describes, “Starved and exhausted – most [of the men] had lost 20 pounds” (145). This loss of strength was not favorable for what was supposed to be an elite fighting force. The Marines arrived in New Zealand in July (Hoffman 5). The troops planned on having training time in New Zealand (J. Michaud 2). However, the operation was pushed forward and the Marines left New Zealand in Mid-July (Christ 29). With a less than ideal journey behind them, the Paramarines and their fellow soldiers would only face more adverse situations as the attack on Guadalcanal approached.

With Guadalcanal being the first amphibious attack by the United States in World War II, the Marines needed time to train that they simply did not have (Christ 1). The only option was to practice on the way to the invasion around the island of Fiji. Their practiced amphibious landings were thwarted by coral and rough landing sites (Christ 30). The failed training exercises would only be a small bump on a road of failures that was the Guadalcanal invasion.

The final misstep of the preparation for Guadalcanal was the last minute change of weaponry. Originally, the Marines were assigned Springfield submachine guns, high-quality weapons that received the approval of the troops (Christ 35). With a shortage of superior equipment, Johnson light machine guns and Reising folding-stock submachine guns were given to the Marines (Jersey 147). The Reising, also known as the “grease gun”, became a substantial problem on the front lines. The gun was known to malfunction because of imperfections in its folding-stock design (Christ 29). Additionally, Jersey mentions its substandard 150 yard range (147). This was the gun that Wilfred Michaud used in the Battle of Gavutu (J. Michaud 9). The poor living conditions, inadequate training, and inferior equipment would seemingly set the Paramarines and company up for failure, but these mishaps were only the beginning.

It was now early August 1942 and time to deploy the Marine forces for the first Allied offensive in the Pacific. The campaign was named Operation Watchtower (J. Michaud 3). The



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islands included in Operation Watchtower were Gavutu, Tanambogo, Tulagi, Guadalcanal, and the Florida Islands (J. Michaud 6). Watchtower was split into two operations: X-RAY (Guadalcanal) and YOKE (Gavutu, Tanambogo, Tulagi, and the Florida Islands) (J. Michaud 6). Gavutu and Tanambogo were located in an island complex (Christ 33). Gavutu was the largest island of the complex measuring 21 acres, 250 by 500 yards (Jersey 145). The smallest group of troops was sent to Gavutu, consisting of only the three companies of the 1st Parachute Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Christ 34). The forces on Gavutu included 338 enlisted, 23 officers, 30 naval personnel, 4 doctors, 1 Chaplin, and 1 photographer (Jersey 145). The island was thought to be mostly occupied by Chinese and Korean laborers constructing the airfield (Christ 34). Company A and B were split into squads of 8, having 2 men armed with Reising submachine guns, 3 with Johnson automatic rifles, and 3 with Springfield rifles (Christ 35). Wilfred V. Michaud fought in Company A (J. Michaud 6). Unfortunately, the USMC did not have a wealth of information on the terrain and defense they would encounter during Operation Watchtower (Hoffman 5). The intelligence collected about the defense estimated 1850 men on the islands of Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo (Hoffman 6). In actuality, there were only 536 on Gavutu and Tanambogo, but the difficulty of the terrain made up for the decreased man power (Hoffman 6). With plans in place it was time to put Operation Watchtower into action.

The date was August 7, 1942. Operation Watchtower commenced. It began with simultaneous landings on several islands that were preceded by airstrikes and naval gunfire (J. Michaud 6). These assaults took place between 6:30 am and 7:30 am (J. Michaud 6). The first landing of the campaign was that of the Florida Islands. The landing occurred at 7:40 am and was unopposed (J. Michaud 6). The Marines stationed there protected the 1st Raider Battalion and 2nd Marines, 5th Battalion on the island of Tulagi (J. Michaud 6). Tulagi was secured within 40 minutes (J. Michaud 7). Next was Guadalcanal. Landings on Guadalcanal occurred at 8 am and went smoothly, taking the unsuspecting Japanese by surprise. The early actions of the campaign were underway and going well. However, the Marine parachutists attack on Gavutu would not go over with such ease.

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The Paramarines were unable to land on Gavutu until 12 pm (Jersey 96). By this time, the Japanese expected the attack and were able to recuperate from the earlier air and naval assaults (Christ 48). Additionally, the original landing site was destroyed in the air assault (Christ 52). Trying to adjust plans, boats carrying the Marines attempted and failed to land on the beaches due to coral banks that surrounded the island (Jersey 148). The paratroopers were now forced to wade somewhere between 30 and 100 yards into battle (J. Michaud 7). Company A was the first to disembark (Jersey 149). The group was able to land unopposed until the men reached 75 yards inland where they were pinned to the beach (Hoffman 9). Companies B and C followed within 10 minutes, wading through bullets from Gavutu and neighboring Tanambogo (Hoffman 10). The landing alone produced a 10% casualty rate (Jersey 149). Among this 10% were many officers, forcing younger, inexperienced men to step up as leaders (Hoffman 10). This was only the beginning.

All three companies of the 1st Parachute Battalion, 1st Marine Division reached the beach of Gavutu. As they became more aware of the terrain, the Marines noticed important features of the islands. Firstly, each of the two islands had a hill named after its height at the center of the land mass. Hill 148 topped Gavutu, while Hill 121 sat on Tanambogo (Christ 56). A flag bearing the Rising Sun waved atop Tanambogo's Hill 121 (Christ 78). Within the walls of the hills was a network of over 100 caves which were connected by tunnels running through the hills (Christ 103). These hills hid the Japanese and protected them from the air and naval assaults that foreshadowed the Marines' landing (Christ 93). As a result, these attacks had less of an impact than the troops anticipated (Hoffman 9).

Company A worked to hold down the beach while Company B attempted to flank around to the other side of Gavutu's Hill 148 (Hoffman 10). The battalion was able to set up a base camp just inland from the beach (Christ 93). The next task was to take out a central encampment of three bunkers from which the most enemy fire was emanating (J. Michaud 9). The first volunteer to charge the camp was wounded (J. Michaud 9). Wilfred Vincent Michaud volunteered second (J. Michaud 9). With a comrade, Wilfred charged the site with his Reising submachine gun. As he entered the encampment, his gun jammed and he was

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forced to engage in hand-to-hand combat against 8 Japanese soldiers (J. Michaud 9). As Jersey describes the situation, Michaud “eliminated a hazardous obstacle” and helped to “clear the way for the Marines’ advance” (155). This was the act of heroism which earned Wilfred Michaud the Navy Cross. From there, the paratroopers turned their attention to the caves in which the Japanese were hiding. First, the Marines tried shooting at the enemy in the caves, but the shelters provided too much protection. Next, the Marines threw grenades into the caves, but the Japanese simply threw them back. Finally, the Marines found a technique that worked. The men shoved explosives, rocks, and bullets into cans, taped them to wooden planks, and pushed them into the caves (Christ 96). This method turned the battle in favor of the United States. Despite some friendly fire from a navy dive bomber on Hill 148 while the Marines were atop it and a collapse of authority due to the loss of many officers, Gavutu was secured by nightfall (Christ 114).

The focus of the 1st Parachute Battalion now shifted to Hill 121 on Tanambogo. Aware of their imminent fate, the Japanese forces attempted to burn the causeway that connected the two islands (Jersey 160). The Marines fought through the night, faced with periodic attacks from Japanese snipers (Jersey 184). The following day, members of the 2nd Marine Battalion came to support the weary Paramarines (J. Michaud 10). The troops were able to secure Tanambogo by 11 pm (J. Michaud 11). Of the 536 Japanese defending the islands, 516 were killed in battle (J. Michaud 11). For the Marine parachutists, the Battle of Gavutu-Tanambogo brought an over 20% casualty rate (Hoffman 11). 30 of the less than 400 Paramarines were killed, and 50 wounded (Hoffman 11). With their numbers severely depleted, the paratroopers were sent to defend Tulagi and act as a reserve force for the remainder of the campaign (Jersey 183).

The Marine Parachutists role in the Guadalcanal Campaign did not end when the Battle of Gavutu-Tanambogo did. The battalion continued to aid in the defense of the islands involved in Operation Watchtower, as well as fight in the battles of Edson’s Ridge, Bloody Ridge, Vella LaVella, and Bouganville into the fall of 1943 (Christ 245). By this point, the Paramarines were up to a nearly 50% casualty rate (J. Michaud 14). The importance of the

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paratroopers' role in the Pacific arena of World War II cannot be overstated. J. Michaud credits the battalion for experiencing, "some of the fiercest fighting of the entire Guadalcanal campaign" (7). One indication of this was the 46 "recommendations for meritorious citations" in the Battle of Gavutu-Tanambogo alone (Christ 148). The Paramarines officially disbanded in early 1944 (Christ 295). Regardless of the unit's short lifespan, the impact these men had on the outcome of World War II will live on throughout history.

After researching the history of my topic, I turned my attention to the personal piece, my grandfather's story. Between my family's collection of primary sources and John Michaud's "The Best and Bravest", I was able to learn many details of Wilfred's experience. Unfortunately, I will never know every aspect of his service, but through my review of these documents I have been able to piece together much of his military and civilian life.

Wilfred was born December 15, 1920 in Portland, Maine ("Wilfred V. Michaud Obituary"). He graduated from Cheverus Catholic High School in 1938 ("Wilfred V. Michaud Obituary"). While in high school, Wilfred met Doris Irene Rand. Doris lived on Peak's Island, off the coast of Portland, and attended Portland High School. After high school, the two attended business school together. In July of 1940, 19-year old Wilfred enlisted as a private in the United States Marine Corps (J. Michaud 3). He began his service as a clerical worker, utilizing his skills from business school ("Pvt. Wilfred V. Michaud"). With U.S. involvement escalating, Michaud moved from clerical work to parachutist training in the spring of 1942 (J. Michaud 3). With his training completed, Wilfred Vincent Michaud became a member of the elite 1st Parachute Battalion, 1st Marine Division.

As discussed before, the Marine Parachutists participated in the Guadalcanal campaign in August 1942. Michaud entered the campaign as a Sergeant, but was quickly promoted to a Platoon Sergeant (J. Michaud 6). He was placed in Company A, the first company to hit the beach of Gavutu (J. Michaud 6). It was there that Wilfred charged the Japanese's central encampment. It was that act of courage that earned him the Navy Cross, as well as a battlefield promotion to 2nd Lieutenant ("Officer Cited for Killing of 8 Japanese"). Michaud participated in 3 tours during the Guadalcanal campaign ("News of Maine Man and Maid in

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Service: Surprise Raid on Bougainville Described by Portland Marine”). When his platoon reached Bouganville, their final battle of the campaign, only 13 of his 33 men were in fighting condition (“News of Maine Man and Maid in Service: Surprise Raid on Bougainville Described by Portland Marine”). At the end of the campaign, Wilfred went home a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps (“News of Maine Man and Maid in Service: Surprise Raid on Bougainville Described by Portland Marine”).

Another interesting feature of Wilfred Michaud’s life was the story of his brother, John H. Michaud. John was Wilfred’s older brother by 5 years. After Wilfred enlisted in the Marines, John joined the United States Army. John attended Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning in Georgia (“Portland Man Killed While A Prisoner”). Upon graduation, he was assigned as a 2nd Lieutenant (“Officer Cited for Killing of 8 Japanese”) to the 424th Infantry Regiment of the 106th Division at Fort Jackson in South Carolina (“Portland Man Killed While A Prisoner”). John was later promoted to 1st Lieutenant and reassigned to the 81st Engineer Combat Battalion (“Portland Man Killed While A Prisoner”). He was 29 years old when his division participated in the Battle of the Bulge. It was then that John was captured by the German Army and imprisoned at camp Stalag 12A in Limburg, Germany (“John H. Michaud”). John was killed on December 23, 1944 while trying to escape (Interment Control Forms). John received the Purple Heart for his sacrifice and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery (Interment Control Forms). The tragic loss of his brother played an important role in Wilfred’s life. Wilfred named his first and only son in honor of his lost brother.

After returning to the States, Michaud remained an active duty Marine until fall 1945 (Forrestal, James 1). During this time, he was stationed all across the country including locations such as Camp Lejeune in New River, North Carolina (“Maine Men in Service: Local Marine is Given Commendation”) and Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, California (“Miss Doris I. Rand Is Wedded to Lt. W. Michaud in Maryland”). He also graduated from Rifleman Training (Knox 1) and Air Infantry School (Pottinger 1). Meanwhile, Doris Rand was also doing her part to serve her country. Doris worked as a code breaker for the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) of the United States Naval Reserve (“Miss Doris

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I. Rand Is Wedded to Lt. W. Michaud in Maryland”). She was stationed in Washington DC (“Miss Doris I. Rand Is Wedded to Lt. W. Michaud in Maryland”) and Dayton, Ohio (Anderson). While Wilfred was on leave, the two were married at St. Mary’s Church in Rockville, Maryland on March 9, 1944 (“Miss Doris I. Rand Is Wedded to Lt. W. Michaud in Maryland”).

The time then came for Wilfred to transition to civilian life. He remained part of the Marine Corps by becoming a reservist. He requested to be stationed in Portland, Maine or Portsmouth, New Hampshire on recruiting or naval prison duty in order to be closer to his family and aid in his departure from active duty (W. Michaud Letter to the Commandant of the Marine Corps 1). He was stationed at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in November 1945 (Powell 1). In his time as a reservist, Wilfred was promoted to Captain in 1948 (“Promotion to Captain in the Marine Corps Reserve of the United States” 1) and then Major in 1951 (“Promotion to Major in the United States Marine Corps Reserve” 1). He was called back to active duty for the Korean War in the early 1950s (“Wilfred V. Michaud Obituary”). Wilfred also worked as the manager of a Woolworth’s in Somerset, Massachusetts (W. Michaud “Reserve Officer Promotion Questionnaire”). He later settled in Camden, Maine where he and Doris owned a local five and dime general store (Strunk 1). Wilfred officially retired from the United States Marine Corps as a Major in 1963 after over 20 years of service (Shoup 1). He spent the rest of his civilian life with his wife and their 5 children. In his later years, he wintered in Sarasota, Florida with Doris. After suffering 13 heart attacks and 3 strokes, Wilfred passed away at age 64 in Sarasota on March 26, 1985 (State of Florida). He is buried in Augusta, Maine at the Maine Veterans Memorial Cemetery next to Doris.

My grandfather’s story has genuinely inspired me. I have always had a curiosity in military history, specifically that of the World War II era. Having the opportunity to research a topic that interests me while learning about a hero so closely related to me that I will never have the chance to meet has been an incredible opportunity. Telling Wilfred’s story to an audience is truly an honor.

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In investigative poetry, conducting a review of the literature is a necessary component of producing historically accurate piece. Having reviewed what the current literature provides about the history of parachutists in the United States Marine Corps and their critical part in the Battle of Gavutu, I now have the historical context needed to produce authentic poetry on the subject. Moreover, by analyzing the primary source documents from my family's collection, I have gained an understanding of Wilfred Vincent Michaud's life in terms of his military career and beyond. With this knowledge at my disposal, I will be able to write poems that tell Wilfred's story, even as those who remember his circumstance become fewer and fewer. It is my hope that through this capstone I will make others aware of the importance of preserving history as well as show them that it can be done in a creative way.

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**POEMS FOR MY WOOFIE: THE STORY OF LT. WILFRED V. MICHAUD, 1<sup>ST</sup> PARACHUTE, 1<sup>ST</sup> MARINE DIVISION**

## Poems for My Woofie

The Story of Lt. Wilfred V. Michaud, 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division



Bryant University Honors Program Final Senior Capstone  
Allison Orr  
Faculty Advisor: Mary Prescott  
Editorial Reviewer: Tom Chandler  
December 2015

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My senior capstone project is the creation of a book of investigative poetry. The subject of the work is my grandfather, Wilfred V. Michaud. He was a lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps during World War II. The poetry addresses the history of Michaud's battalion and the battles it fought, as well as personal stories of Michaud's life and experience in the service.

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Pvt. Wilfred V. Michaud

The 20-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. T. F. Michaud of 1133 Congress Street put to use the stenographic training he received at Cheverus Classical High School after he joined the Marines here last July 11. Stationed at Parris Island, S. C., he is already company clerk and performs secretarial duties at courts martial. Home on 10-day furlough, he is due to report back Dec. 30.

\* \* \*



DATE OF PHOTO 4 SEPTEMBER 1951

*Wilfred V. Michaud*  
WILFRED V. MICHAUD MAJOR, USMCR

“Growing Up a Marine” walks through Wilfred’s experience in the service, reflecting on how it changed him. Wilfred was most certainly a different man when he came home from war than when he left. He enlisted at 19 years of age. He was only 21 during the Guadalcanal campaign. As a result, Wilfred’s service was a major time of growth and maturity. Serving during World War II was an experience that shaped the young man and left memories that lasted a lifetime.

## Growing Up a Marine

He started as bright and shiny boy  
They gave him a cold and black gun  
And shipped him off to fight

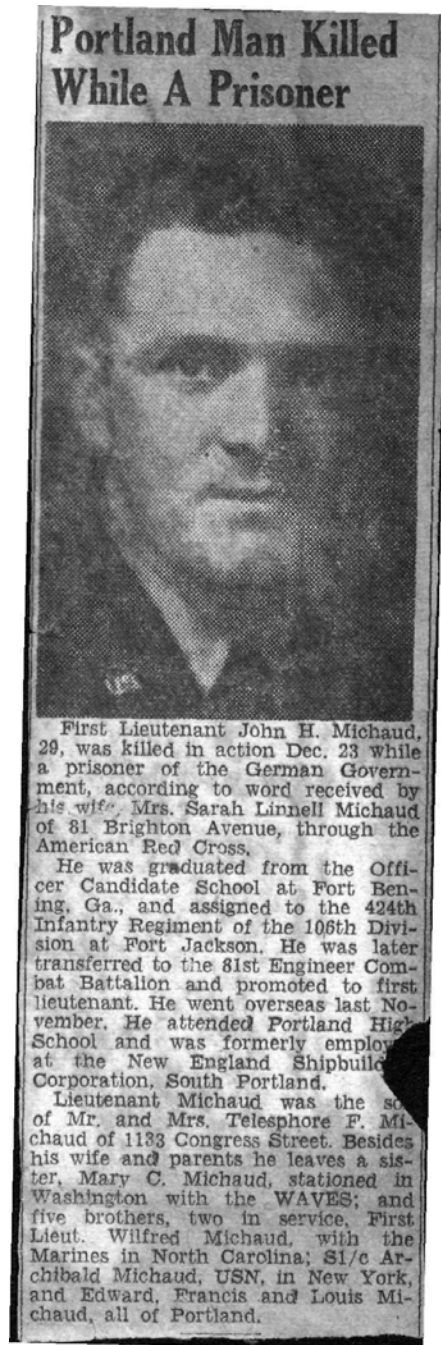
That bright and shiny boy did not return  
Instead a tarnished and scratched young man  
Battered by the violence he had seen

That tarnished and scratched young man continued his duty  
But his duty wore on him  
Wore him into a weathered and dulled old man

That weathered and dulled old man withered  
Overcome by the passage of time he died  
Now we remember that bright and shiny boy

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“Brothers” was written to pay homage to Wilfred’s older brother, John. After Wilfred enlisted in the Marines, John joined the Army in order to keep up with his younger brother. John fought in Europe as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. During the Battle of the Bulge, John and many others in his division were taken prisoner. John was killed by the German Army while imprisoned. In honor of his brother, Wilfred later named his first and only son John.

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## Brothers

The two grew up in Portland, Maine,  
Part of a big family.  
Their father was a WWI veteran.  
Wilfred was born the youngest of six boys,  
John was five years older.  
Brothers in blood.

Wilfred volunteered to enlist,  
John was inspired to follow.  
Wilfred started as a clerical worker,  
John attended Officer Candidate School.  
Wilfred fought as a marine in Guadalcanal,  
John was a soldier in the Battle of the Bulge.  
Wilfred became a hero against the Japanese,  
John was a prisoner of the Germans.  
Wilfred stormed the beaches of the Pacific,  
John was killed trying to escape the camp,  
Wilfred received the Navy Cross for his bravery,  
John was awarded the Purple Heart for his sacrifice.  
Brothers in blood and battle.

Wilfred returned home,  
John did not.  
Wilfred came back to his wife,  
John had to leave his behind.  
Wilfred named his son after his lost brother,  
John's memory is honored through him.  
Wilfred lived out the rest of his days with his family,  
John's legacy lives on through his family.  
Brothers in blood, battle, and spirit.

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“Operation Watchtower” tells the story of the Battle of Gavutu. The story is told from Wilfred’s point of view. The poem is written in a way that informs the reader of some of the factual events of the battle, as well as the intangible aspects that Wilfred and other marines experienced. The piece can be read like prose, but is set up like a poem and meant to be read as if Wilfred was speaking about the event.

## Operation Watchtower

The whole landing was a blur.  
There wasn't room to think about what was happening.  
You could only focus on making it to that island,  
and hope that you didn't have any holes in you when you got there.

On the island we had a hard time finding our enemy,  
let alone killing them.  
All we could do was wait for them to fire, pray,  
and fire back in the same direction.

We shot at them, we threw grenades.  
They shot back, and threw grenades back.  
It seemed as though whatever we dished out,  
they gave right back to us.

We weren't making any progress.  
We were desperate, and it showed.  
We had to do something, and we did.  
Somehow we managed to have Gavutu by nightfall.

It rained all night.  
We hid among the darkness in pools of water and friends' blood.  
Fear kept us from sleeping.  
There wasn't much we could do but hope we saw the sun rise over the enemy hill.

When morning came so did back up and a feeling of relief.  
We were able to finish the job before the end of the day.  
I still can't quite straighten everything out that we saw and lived through that day,  
but I do know I'm one of the lucky ones because I can say that.

It's not a story I tell often,  
but it's one that deserves to be heard.  
Good men fought that day and good men died that day.  
I'm proud to say I was there with them.



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Associated Press. *Navy Cross*. 2013. *The Washington Times*. Web. 4 November 2015.  
<<http://www.washingtontimes.com/multimedia/image/navy-crossjpg/>>

“The Navy Cross” is about the award Wilfred received for his actions in the Battle of Gavutu. The medal is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest valor decoration. It is awarded for extraordinary heroism in combat. The only higher award is the Medal of Honor. Through this poem, I aim to not only describe the physical characteristics of the Navy Cross, but also its intangible value.

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### The Navy Cross

To the eyes,  
It is merely a small bronze cross.  
It is made of metal that is smooth and matte.  
It has curved arms.  
It is decorated with laurels, a ship, and anchors.  
It is suspended by a navy and white ribbon.

To the heart,  
It means so much more.

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*Naval ensign of the Empire of Japan. 1941. Wikimedia Commons. Wikimedia Foundation. Web. 4 November 2015.*

*<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naval\\_ensign\\_of\\_the\\_Empire\\_of\\_Japan.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naval_ensign_of_the_Empire_of_Japan.svg)  
>*

This page contains a series of haikus. Though they are not pure in form, I wanted to experiment with this style of poetry. Haikus are of Japanese origin. Because of this, I thought it would be interesting and ironic to use the art form to discuss the Japanese forces Wilfred faced during the Guadalcanal campaign. The haikus are used to describe the nature of the Japanese war tactics and paint a picture of the marines' opposition.

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the rising sun flag / waves atop one-twenty-one / enemies await

a series of caves / the imperial empire / lies shielded from war

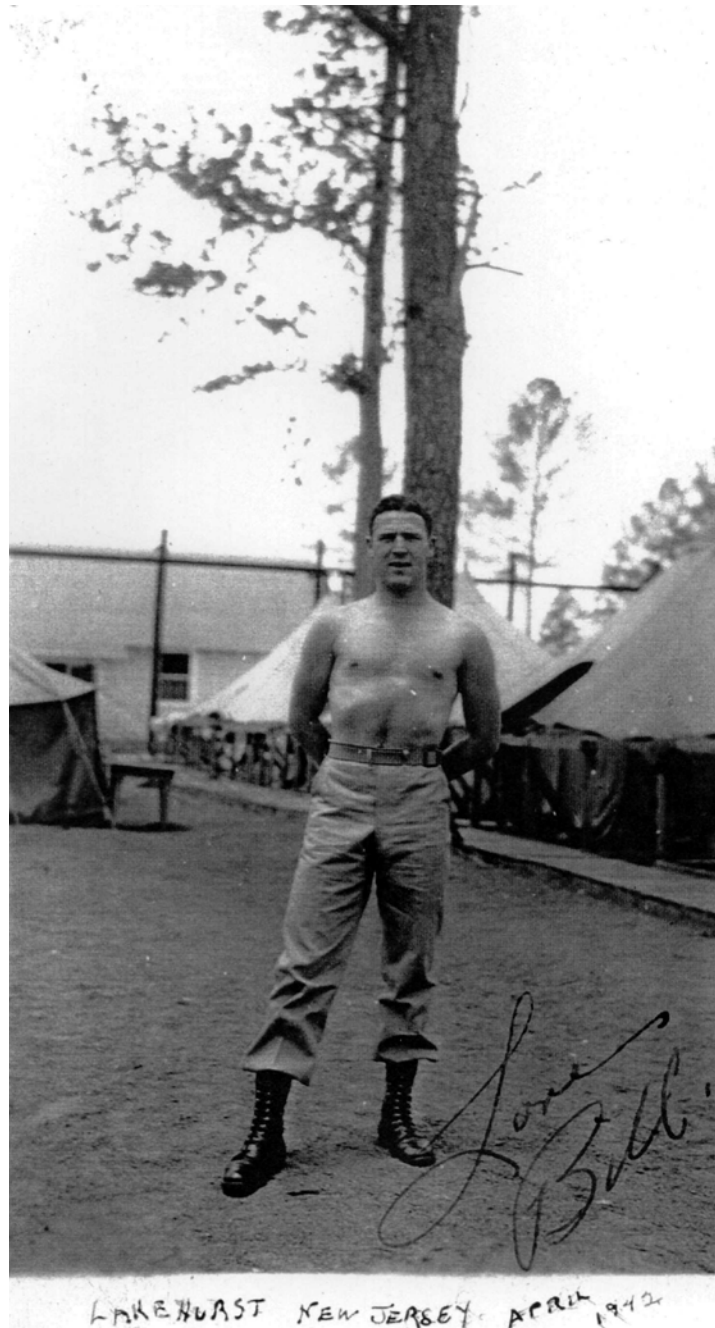
it rained, bullets flew / pools full of blood and water / raining bullets all night

an unparalleled force / willing to pay any price / only death stopped them

elusive weapons / undetected adversaries / invisible war

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In "A Hero's Heart", I compare Wilfred's attack on the Japanese encampment to a heart attack. Later in life, Wilfred suffered numerous heart attacks, which eventually led to his death. This poem ties together two very different moments that occurred at very different times. However, both events represented important turning points in Wilfred's life.

## A Hero's Heart

The central encampment  
The beating heart

Pumping bullets  
Pumping blood

A hero charges the enemy  
A blood clot travels through his veins

The hero fights a war that pits man against man  
The heart starts a battle in the hero's body

A hero's heart provides the courage  
A hero's heart turns against him

The enemy's mission is thwarted  
The hero's life is threatened

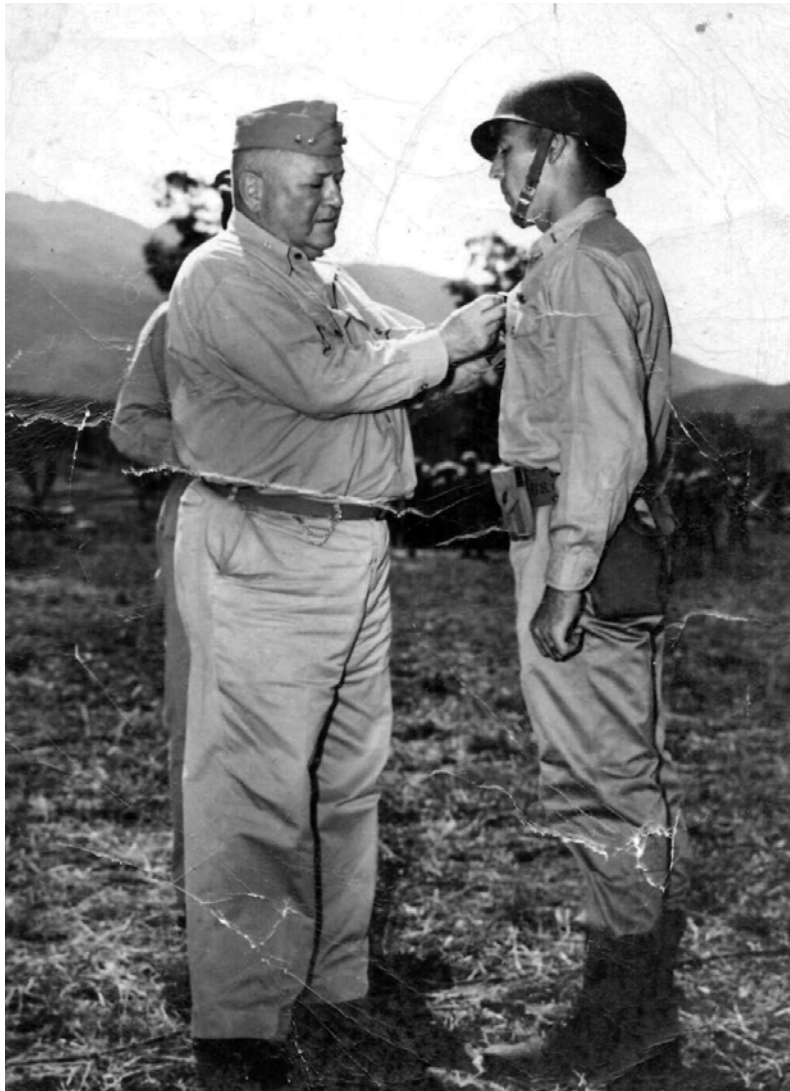
His triumph would fade into a distant memory  
His heart problems would become reality

The heart that made him a hero  
The heart that ended his life

Two times in a man's life  
Two sides of the same heart

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“An Act of Honor” describes the act of heroism that earned Wilfred the Navy Cross. In this moment, Wilfred and a comrade charged a Japanese encampment from which the heaviest opposition was emanating. One other volunteer attempted to attack the site before Wilfred, but was shot in the process. Wilfred volunteered next. He was armed with a Reising M55, known to the Marines as a “grease gun”. The Reising submachine guns were notorious for their frequent malfunctions. Wilfred’s gun jammed during the attack and he was forced to adapt. Together, he and his comrade killed all eight of the Japanese in the bunker using hand-to-hand combat. This act eliminated a dangerous obstacle and allowed for the further advancement of U.S. troops. Toward the end of the poem, I also illustrate the conflict Wilfred felt after serving. He never spoke of his time in the Pacific. Those who knew him understood that he was burdened by the actions he was forced to carry out. Though what he did was obviously a valiant act on behalf of his country, the morality of the situation was not as clear at times for Wilfred.

## An Act of Honor

A single bunker delivered the worst,  
there was no question,  
we needed to attack.

One comrade went before me,  
this comrade fell before me,  
it was my turn.

Reising in hand,  
bravery in heart,  
duty in mind.

My sweaty hands gripped the cold steel,  
racing through the thick forest,  
my feet pounding ground with each step.

Surrounded by the crack of gunshots,  
there was no room for fear or hesitation,  
we reached the encampment.

Eight Japanese against two Americans,  
our disadvantage worsened,  
my weapon jammed.

Unarmed,  
in danger.  
I had to fight.

There was no time to think,  
there was only one way out,  
them or us.

With only our bayonets,  
hand-to-hand combat engaged,  
guided only by the need to live.

Thrusting my blade through their chests,  
I felt their flesh tear with each puncture,  
heard the gasps of their last breaths.



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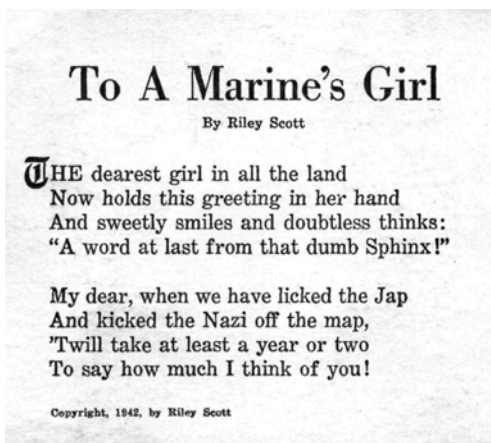
Blood, pain, and death,  
two Americans victorious,  
saved by desperation.

I looked at the carnage I had caused,  
men lying in pools of their own blood,  
I could not believe I was its maker.

An act of honor,  
an act of horror,  
it depends which side you are on.

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“My Dearest Bill” serves to illustrate Wilfred and his wife, Doris’s, relationship. They met in high school. Wilfred attended Cheverus High School and Doris attended Portland High School. Wilfred lived on the mainland, while Doris lived on Peak’s Island. Both joined the service during World War II. Doris enlisted as a Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service for the United States Naval Reserve. She was stationed in Dayton, Ohio as a code breaker. As the poem states, they were married on leave on March 9, 1944. After the war, they started a family. During their adult lives, they lived around New England raising their five children. They eventually retired and settled in Camden, Maine during the summers and Venice, Florida for the winters. In 1984, Wilfred died of a heart attack in Sarasota. Doris returned to Camden year-round to be near her now grown children and grandchildren. Doris died in 2002 after suffering a brain aneurysm. They are buried side-by-side at the Maine Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Augusta.

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My Dearest Bill,

Do you remember when we met?

I lived on the island  
You lived in the city  
The ocean separated us

Do you remember how it started?

So young, in high school  
I rode that ferry just to see you  
Nothing could stop us

Do you remember our time apart?

I was cracking code in Dayton  
You fighting for us in the Pacific  
A world divided us

Do you remember when we married?

The both of us on leave  
Together in DC  
Two lives united into one

Do you remember when you returned?

You resting after a grueling tour  
I was by your side  
We needed each other

Do you remember when John was born?

It was no longer just the two of us  
Four girls would follow  
Our life would never be the same

Do you remember how you got out?

You could be home with us always  
We were so happy to have you  
A family with all its pieces

Do you remember when we grew old?

We summered in Maine  
And wintered in Florida  
I could only imagine it with you

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Do you remember when you passed?  
You couldn't fight it any longer  
I had to face life alone  
A lifetime stood between us

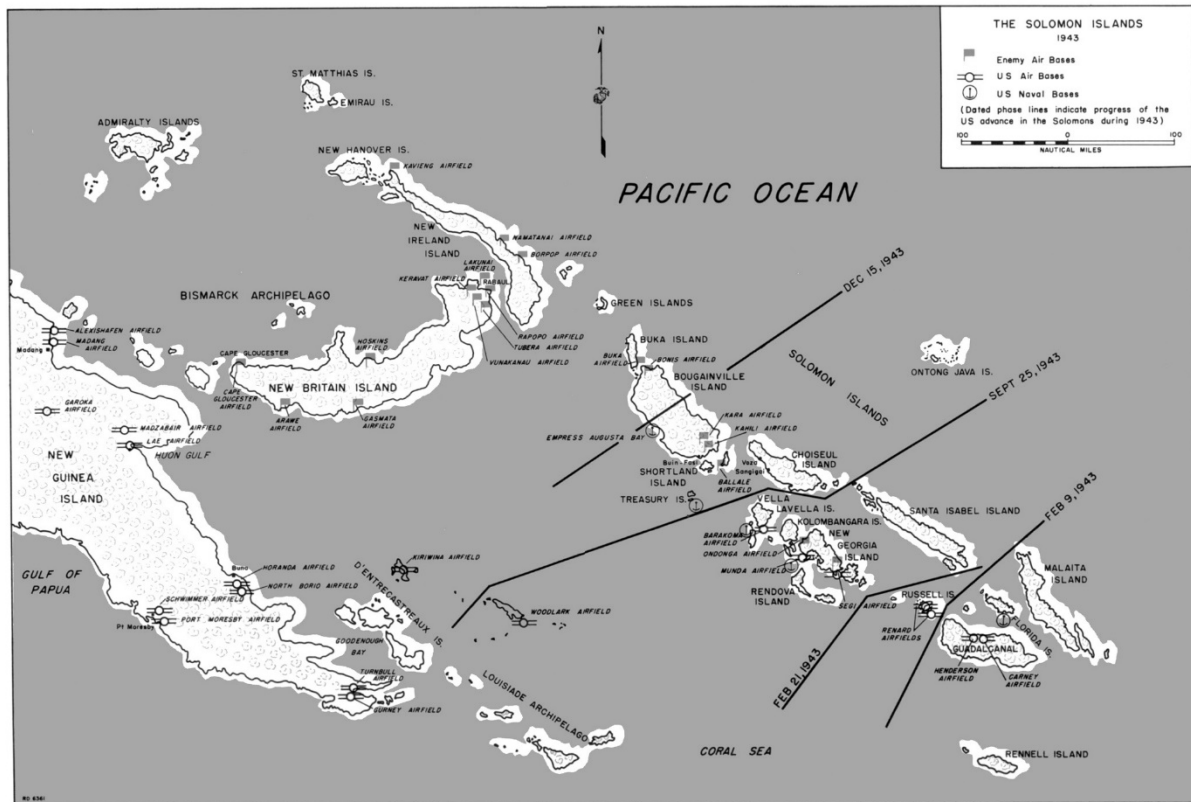
Do you remember when I followed?  
I was sad to leave our loved ones  
But happy to join you there  
Together again, this time forever

Do you remember?

I love you Darling,

Doris

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United States Marine Corps. *Solomon Islands Campaign*. Wikimedia Commons. Wikimedia Foundation. Web. 4 November 2015.  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Solomon\\_Islands\\_Campaign.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Solomon_Islands_Campaign.jpg)>

“Hell’s Islands” is named after Stanley Coleman’s *Hell’s Islands*. This book was a significant source of my secondary research. Additionally, its title is an accurate description of what the battlefields of the Pacific campaign must have felt like to the marines. This piece is a broader account of what the entire campaign felt like to Wilfred. Though much of my research focuses on the Battle of Gavutu, Wilfred was involved in several other battles in the Pacific. Through this poem, I express what he must have felt moving from island to island, battle to battle during his 5-month tour.

## Hell's Islands

When I went to war, I was headed for hell.  
It didn't end when a battle was won.  
There was no celebration, no time for rest, no goodbyes to the fallen.  
It was on to the next island, the next circle of hell.  
We started on Gavutu and ended at Bougainville.  
It may have only been a few months, but every day was a lifetime.  
I must have set foot on over a half a dozen islands.  
They were all the same to me.  
Hot and humid.  
Drenched with sweat, the heat weighing us down.  
Sand and jungle.  
The dirt stuck to our faces as we fought through the thick forest.  
War and death.  
Those islands, that hell, took so many men.  
A part of me died with them.  
A part of me is still in hell.

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Camden Harbor Inn. Web 4 November 2015.  
<<http://www.camdenharbourinn.com/fall/fall.htm>>

“Over 40 Years Ago and More Than 8,000 Miles Away” represents the constant reminders of Wilfred’s time at war. The experiences he had as a marine on Gavutu were not easily forgotten. This piece takes images of Wilfred’s everyday life living in Camden, Maine and relates them back to the Battle of Gavutu.

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Over 40 Years Ago and More Than 8,000 Miles Away

The buoys that fill Camden Harbor bob  
the same way our helmets did as we waded ashore.

The sound of the tide coming in here  
is just as it was when it washed up on the Pacific sand.

The sails of the docked boats sway in the salt-soaked breeze  
just like the palm trees of the island's jungle.

Mount Battie's stone tower  
reminds me of that enemy encampment.

Noisy rain against my roof  
takes me back to the drenched darkness of that night.

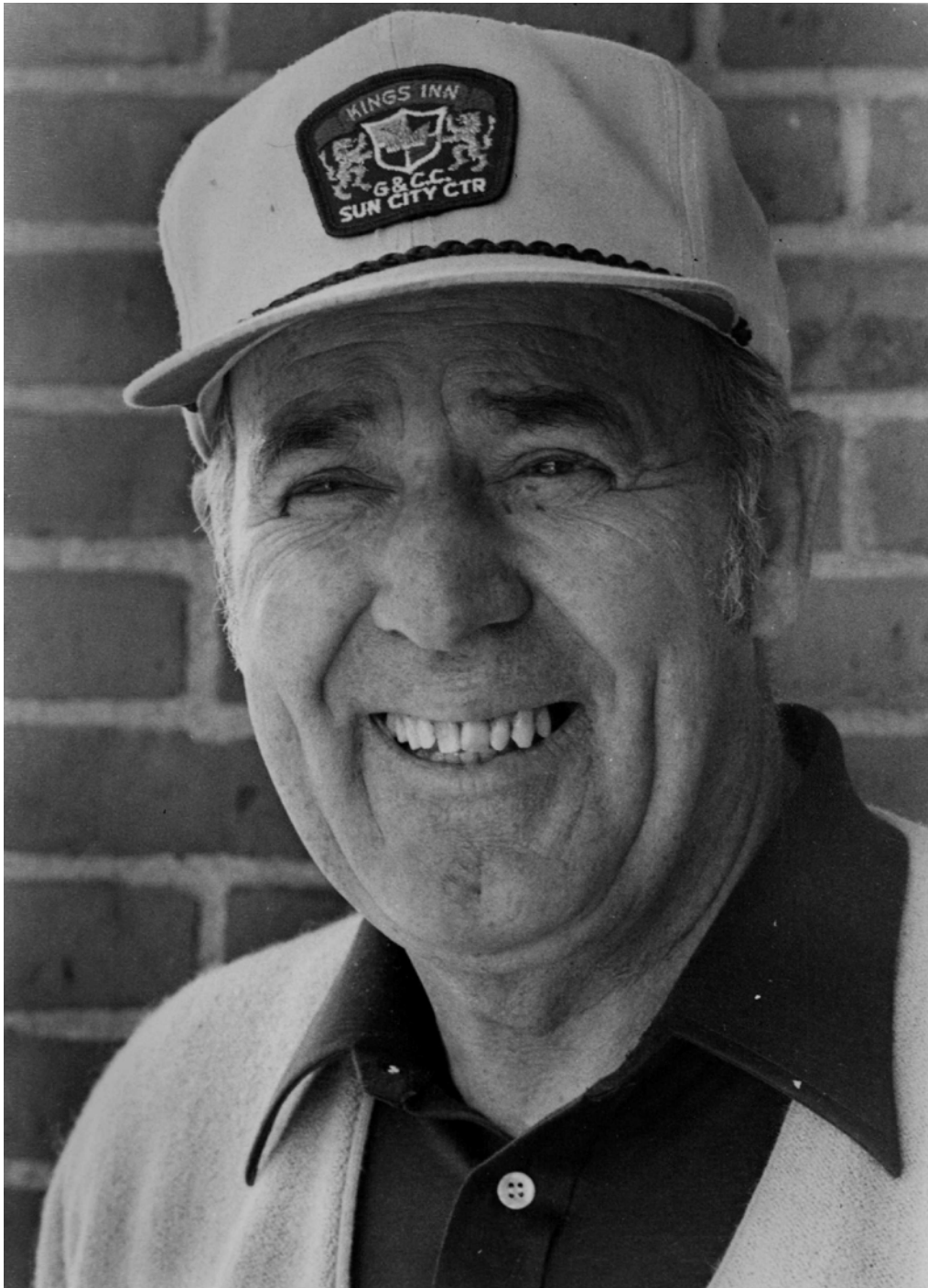
Smoke from chimneys on winter evenings billows  
as it did from the caves of Gavutu.

I search for that rising sun flag atop the hills of my hometown.



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Though my project focuses on Wilfred's military career, I did want to demonstrate the other parts of his life. A single person can be something different to various people. In "Wilfred", I illustrate all of the aspects of Wilfred's life and how they came together to make him the man that he was to all of us.

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Wilfred

To most, he was a marine.

A marine who risked his life for the freedom of others.

To his mom and dad, he was their youngest son.

A son whose accomplishments filled their hearts with pride.

To John, he was his closest brother.

A brother who motivated him to serve his country.

To Doris, he was her husband.

A husband who shared a life of love and happiness with her.

To his five children, he was a father.

A father who supported and cherished them.

To his customers, he was a store owner.

A store owner who was committed to his business.

To the people of his town, he was a neighbor.

A neighbor who actively cared for his community.

To me, he was an inspiration.

An inspiration that I will always carry with me.

Together, he was Wilfred.

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“My Woofie” means to tell the capstone project from my point of view. My major at Bryant University is Actuarial Mathematics. I have never formally studied poetry and only have a personal interest in World War II history. When deciding the topic of my capstone, I determined if there was ever a time I wanted to take a risk and do something creative it was now. Having an interest in the era, fond memories of writing poetry in grade school, and a desire to better understand my grandfather’s life, a book of poetry about Wilfred Vincent Michaud seemed like the ideal project. Though my project ends with a book chronicling his life, his stories will now continue to be told to all those who read this book.

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My Woofie

My journey started with a leap of faith.

I barely knew you.

I was neither a poet nor a historian.

But something drew me in.

I wanted to know you.

Your story needed to be told.

I researched and learned.

I penned about your service, your family, your life.

I got to know the grandfather I never had.

My journey ended with a book.

My book is finished.

But you live on through it.