

Chapter 31 Primary Source Activity

The voice of American soldiers in World War II (textbook page 804) was the weekly magazine *YANK*, published between 1942 and 1945. Ordinary soldiers, officers, and war correspondents shared their thoughts, experiences, and problems in its pages. Here Merle Miller writes about the first few hours after the American victory in the battle for Kwajalein Island, in the Marshall Islands (March 1944). ♦ *As you read this piece, think about the circumstances in which it was written. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

After the Battle at Kwajalein

Although there is still some occasional rifle fire and the smoke still curls from the ruined concrete pillboxes, the veterans of the Army's Seventh Division are now sitting under the trees or lying on the ground with V-mail blanks, writing their first letters home.

Most of the letters are short and simple. The men cannot say that they are on Kwajalein, cannot give details of the action they fought here, cannot name friends who were injured, cannot give the date, and cannot say where they came from and where they are going. They can't say much of anything except "I'm still alive and well." But that is enough.

The officers are wearing their insignia again. There are heated arguments about whether the First Platoon of Company A killed more [Japanese soldiers] than the Third Platoon of Company L. Hardly anyone knows for sure just how many . . . he did kill . . .

Everywhere burial details are removing the remains of the last dead [Japanese soldiers]. A few minutes ago, an unarmed private in a graves registration unit adjusted his gas mask and went into a small pillbox

near the center of the island, an area that was supposed to have been completely cleared of [Japanese] during the morning of the second day of the battle.



American GI in the Pacific front writing in his diary

A split second later, the private ran yelling from the pillbox. He thought he had seen ghosts. Following him were two emaciated but very much alive [Japanese] in shorts, their hands in the air. They are now changing into fatigues with PW [prisoner of war] painted on the back.

This morning hundreds of tropical white birds, driven away by the battle, have returned to the island and are resting again on the tops of what they still recognize as trees. A special service officer is looking for the best place to hang the screen for the outdoor movies that

will begin in a few days. . . .

Tonight it will be possible to sleep, but not many of us will. The sickening odor of the dead. . . still fills the air, and there may still be a live one around who is unwilling to surrender.

No one can do much sleeping 24 hours after a battle, anyway.

Source: *YANK The Army Weekly*, by Steve Kruger (St. Martin's Press, 1990).

ILLUSTRATION/PHOTO CREDIT: UPI/BETTMANN.

Questions to Think About

1. What was the first thing that most of the American soldiers did after the battle was over?
2. What does Miller mention to show that in some ways life was returning to normal after the battle?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** What do you think Miller means when he says, "No one can do much sleeping 24 hours after a battle"? What reasons does he mention? What others can you think of?
4. **Activity** Trace or draw a map of the South Pacific showing the islands and island groups that were important in the war (Philippines, Solomons, Marshalls, Marianas; Wake, Midway, Iwo Jima and Okinawa islands). Draw arrows to show the Allied advances across the Pacific toward Japan; label major battles with their dates or add a time line to the map. Remember to include Kwajalein, the subject of this excerpt.