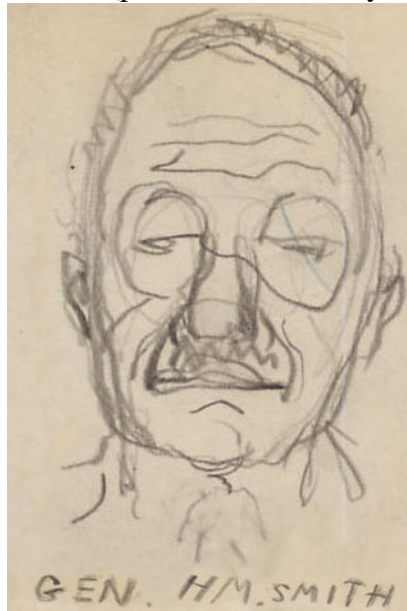


The **Amphibious Assault** at Betio, Tarawa
Its Profound Effect on My Life and Art
by Harry Jackson

On December 7, 1941 America changed abruptly. My cowboy friends Cal Todd and Lowell and Art Thomas volunteered to fight along with thousands of other green lads.

After US Marine boot camp and close combat training in San Diego, California, I was a full-fledged Marine private first class rifleman, but one not yet baptized in enemy **blood**. I made pencil sketches that were much appreciated. The famed Major General Holland M. “Howlin Mad” Smith, was the ranking Marine on the West Coast and in the Pacific, and I made a quick pencil sketch of him after I was assigned to the Fifth Amphibious Corps general intelligence section as a combat sketch artist directly under “Howlin’ Mad” Smith.

On November 2, 1943 Captain Eugene McNerney, Lt. John Popham, Staff sgt. Wesley “Whitey” Kroeneng and I, PFC Harry Jackson, were flown down to join the 2nd Marine Division on their **amphibious assault** against Japan’s heavily fortified globally strategic bomber field on Betio Island (pronounced Beso by the natives), Tarawa Atoll.



The Battle of Betio, commonly referred to as the Battle of Tarawa, lasted 76 hours from 9:00 am, November 20 through 1:00 pm, November 23, 1943.

Though only 291 acres (three Betio's fit inside Central Park in New York City), the island was the site of the first successful **amphibious assault** against an indestructibly fortified position in human history. It was also the most concentrated, **bloody, amphibious conquest** *kill of both sides per 24 hr. day, per half square mile = 320 acres: **BETIO** is only 291 acres.*

Ratio of Kill Concentration on **BETIO Island, TARAWA Atoll
COMPARED TO SIX OTHER **AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULTS**
AGAINST HEAVILY FORTIFIED BEACHES IN THE ENTIRE WORLD STORY OF **AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE****

Amphibious Assaults	Gallipoli	Dieppe	BETIO, TARAWA	Normandy Omaha Beach	Saipan	Peleliu	Iwo Jima
Date	25 IV 1915	19 VIII 1942	20-23 XI 1943	6 VI 1944	15 VI – 9 VII 1944	15 IX – 24 XI 1944	19 II – 16 III 1945
Killed (both sides)	150,000	1,725	6,000	3,000	44,000	12,152	29,836
Battle Area (sq. miles)	50.0	4.0	0.5	18.0	47.0	12.0	7.5
Battle area (½ sq. mile)	100	8	291 acres	36	94	24	15
Killed (½ sq/ mile)	1,500	216	6,000	100	468	506	1,989
Duration (days / hours)	(259.0 days) 6,216 hours	(0.5 days) 12 hours	(3.2 days) 76 hours	(1.0 days) 24 hours	(24.0 days) 576 hours	(70.0 days) 1,680 hours	(25.0 days) 600 hours
Kill concentration (24 hours / ½ sq. mile)	6	432	1895	100	20	6	80

Research by Harry Jackson and Ric Heasler, colors and design by Sgt. David Smith USMC, History Division, Marine Corps Headquarters, Washington DC

“World War II would produce many other bigger and **bloodier Betio, Tarawa**...such as Saipan, Iwo Jima, not to mention Cassino, Omaha Beach Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge and others. **What distinguished Betio, Tarawa was the compression of such high casualties in so few hours.**”--Excerpt from the “Preface to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition”, *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle*, Robert Sherrod, 1993, Fredericksburg, TX, The Admiral Nimitz Foundation. “Yard for yard, **Betio** was the toughest fortified position the Marines would ever face.” *Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa* by Col. Joseph Alexander.

Amphibious Assaults	Combined Kill Totals	BETIO, TARAWA
1. Gallipoli	6	
2. Dieppe	432	
3. Omaha Beach	100	
4. Saipan	20	
5. Peleliu	8	
6. Iwo Jima	80	
Total killed in all battles	646	1,895
Percentage of BETIO, TARAWA	34%	100%

This more compact chart **highlights the glaring fact** that the 76 hour **Combined Kill** at **Betio, Tarawa** was **66% higher** than the **Combined Kill Totals** of the other six **bloodiest amphibious assaults** against heavily fortified beaches per 24 hours per ½ square mile.

I was one of the first 1,500 Marines of the 2nd Division to **assault** the concrete citadel on tiny **Betio, Tarawa**.

The November 20 1943, *New Yorker* magazine covered my *Night Patrol* painting in New York's Museum of Modern Art exhibit "Marines at War", and "The Western painter" Jackson Pollock's first one-man show in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery. That was the exact same day that we began our **assault** against Betio.

This is the initial mystic bond between Jackson Pollock and me. Betio was the world history changing US Marine Corp Combat Artwork painted with the blood, bones and guts of us 8,413 Yank and Jap Marines who wounded and butchered each other on that half square mile human sacrificial altar that was our canvas of sand mounted on living, blood-baptized coral-rock-reef. Though Pollock's greatest painting nor any other of the world's masterpieces could touch that heroic epiphany on the coral-rock butcher's block of Betio. There, Pollock and I were mystically bound together.

No other piece of artwork made with paint depicts the bloody inferno of Betio like Jackson Pollock's *The Moon Woman Cuts the Circle*.

Betio exploded out of Pollock's painting—the whole indescribable assault—the bloody water—the goddamn pointblank fire that wounded and killed us—our own often too-close-in friendly overhead bombardment. Hell and Inferno don't describe it—but those are the weak words we're forced to use.

We landed at the end of the 625-yard long pier, under withering machine gun, rifle, mortar and howitzer fire. I huddled behind a single coconut log with the other Marines from my Higgins boat. I called out for "Whitey", the only person I knew in our particular landing group—"Whitey's" skull was fragmented right next to my right foot. "It was pre-ordained that I ended up alone— That was my "second mystic self-birth"— My "first" was on the Pitchfork Ranch five years earlier.

Then this Marine next to me says, "You're hit." I said, "So are you." His wounds, Whitey's and mine were from a single mortar round. These same mortar fragments that destroyed Whitey planted the seed of Gran-Mal Epilepsy, Intermittent Explosive Rage Disorder and a form of Tourette's Syndrome that still haunt me to this day despite proper medication.

Fifty-eight years later in 2002, I created *Crucifixion at Betio, Tarawa—20 XI 1943*, my six-foot tall painting oil on linen.



Our crucified Savior is Whitey who embodies every warrior who ever lived and was cut down as a green kid. The greenness of Whitey's sacrificed body also symbolizes all of the numberless forms of green life that are continually destroyed by war.