

Chapter 9

BOUGAINVILLE and SOLOMON ISLANDS

The start of World War II in Europe is generally held to be September 1, 1939, beginning with the German invasion of Poland. Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later.¹ What started in northern Europe later involved the vast majority of the world's countries. The United States officially entered the war in Europe on December 11, 1941 when Nazi Germany declared war against the United States. This was in response to what was claimed to be a series of provocations by the United States against Germany when the US was still officially neutral during World War II. The decision to declare war was made by Adolph Hitler, apparently offhand, almost without consultation. Later that day, the United States declared war on Germany.²

World War II was the most widespread war in history, and directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. The major participants threw their entire economic, industrial, and scientific capabilities behind the war effort, erasing the distinction between civilian and military. The deadliest conflict in human history was marked by at least 50 million plus fatalities, most of which were civilians in the Soviet Union and China.³

Paralleling the conflict in continental Europe, the Empire of Japan was already at war with the Republic of China in 1937.⁴ The United States directly entered WW II immediately after the Japanese bombed the American Pacific naval fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. President Roosevelt described the sudden and unprovoked deliberate attack on Pearl Harbor as, "*a date that will live in infamy.*"⁵ By building up its military strength at a rate far exceeding anything the nation of Japan thought possible, the United States was eventually able to defeat Japan.



Marines fight the last remaining Japanese on Tinian Island, Photograph Courtesy Atomic Heritage Foundation

One of the most historic examples of this fact is the story of Tinian Island in the Pacific Ocean 6,000 miles from San Francisco. It is a small island, less than 40 square miles, 1,500 miles southeast of Tokyo, Japan and approximately 1,600 miles due east of the Philippines. Tinian is one of fifteen islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.⁶

On July 24, 1944, 30,000 US Marines landed on the beaches of Tinian. Eight days later, over 8,000 of the 8,800 Japanese soldiers on the island were dead (vs. 328 Marines), and four months later the Seabees had built the busiest airfield of World War II, dubbed the North Field. It consisted of four airfields and supported 269 B-29



Navy Seabees coming ashore to build North Field air base, Photograph Courtesy of Atomic Heritage Foundation

bombers. North Field was to become the largest airbase in the world enabling B-29 Super Fortresses to launch air strikes on the Philippines, Okinawa and mainland Japan. On August 6, 1945, North Field became the most historical airstrip on earth.⁷

On August 5, 1945, a B-29 was maneuvered over a bomb loading pit at North Field and then taxied to Runway Able. At 2:45 am on August 6, the B-29 - piloted by Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets of the 509th Composite Group, who had named the plane after his mother, Enola Gay - took off. On August 6 at 8:15 am Hiroshima time, the

“Little Boy” atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. A minute later, the bomb exploded. Three days later, on August 9, another B-29, Bockscar and support planes took off from Tinian. Hours later the “Fat Man” atomic bomb exploded over the city of Nagasaki at 11:02 AM Nagasaki time. The end of the war with Japan was near.⁸



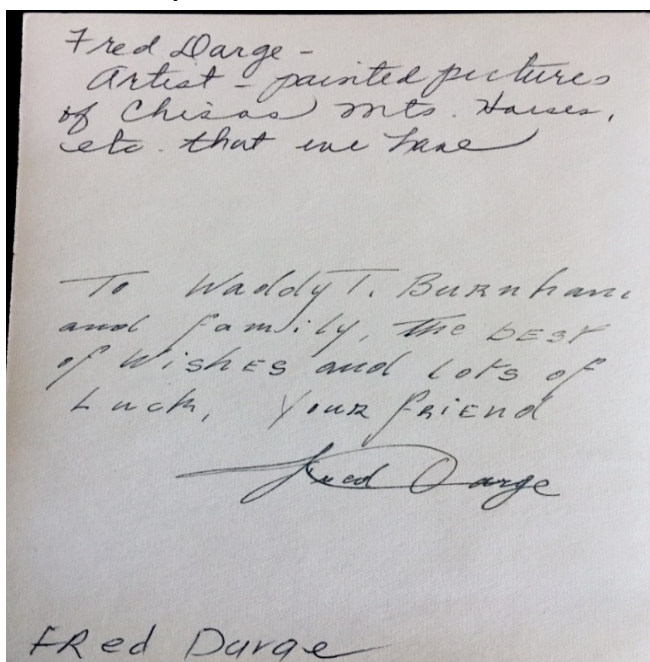
Tinian Island (40 acre), Photograph Courtesy of Atomic Heritage Foundation

J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967), theoretical physicist, director of the Los Alamos Laboratory and responsible for the research and design of the atomic bomb, often known as the “father of the atomic bomb,” believed that fifty atomic bombs would be needed to defeat Japan. The war with Japan abruptly ended with the dropping of the first two atomic bombs ever

used in war. The surrender of Imperial Japan was belatedly announced on August 15, 1945 and formally signed on September 2, 1945, thus bringing the deadly hostilities to a close.⁹ One is left wondering that in the six days after the dropping of the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki if the Japanese were not warned about the other 48 atomic bombs still to be dropped on other cities in Japan.



Photograph of Private Fred Darge, circa 1943, sent to Burnham family.



Card that accompanied above photograph sent by Fred Darge to Waddy T. Burnham, Jr. and family, Courtesy of Burnham family archives.

He also served on Bougainville Island also known as Bougainville Province or the North Solomons, but is not part of the state of Solomon Islands. All of these islands were invaded by the Japanese during World War II.¹¹

Fred Darge, although not yet an American citizen, was inducted into the U.S. Army on November 11, 1942. At this stage of the war the military needed not only factory workers to produce armaments, but needed all the available military personnel they could muster. Although Darge was of German nationality, he could still pledge to defend his new country where he had lived the past 22 years without incident. Darge like many other German-Americans, became an American soldier. After completion of basic training, it is presumed Darge was placed in an infantry platoon and headed off to the front lines for possible combat.

Just to be on the safe side, the military routinely stationed soldiers like Fred Darge as far opposite as possible from their native country. There were many Japanese-Americans who served with honor in the United States military during World War II. Many of these soldiers were sent to Italy to join the 442nd Infantry Regiment. They became famous for their outstanding bravery that produced 21 Medal of Honor recipients.¹⁰

Because of Darge's nationality, he like many other German-Americans, was sent to the South Pacific and served in the Solomon Islands, located in the southwestern Pacific, northeast of Australia. The Solomon Islands are a sovereign country consisting of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands covering a land area of 11,000 square miles.

It is undetermined if Darge was involved in any of the bitter combat with the Japanese, or what his general assignment was in the army. It is known that he, like everyone else did carry



Map of Solomon Islands, Photograph Courtesy of Pinterest.com

a rifle and was well trained to shoot to kill or be killed. It is not known if his artistic skills were put to good use as part of his military service. Either way, this time Darge has left a road map of where he presumably traveled, but true to form, no dates. Darge was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army on March 22, 1944 and returned home to Dallas.

With the war still in progress, he was promptly hired by North American Aviation of Dallas (actually located in Grand Prairie) as a technical illustrator and once again put his commercial art skills of drafting and drawing back to work until the end of the war in September of 1945.

From July 2, 1944 thru August 1, 1944 the Dallas Museum of Art held an exhibition, *Fred Darge: Paintings of Bougainville*. The DMA archives have provided not only a list of 34 works of artwork, but titles (with locations), media and prices. This is considered to be a rare find. It clearly shows that Darge not only was stationed at Bougainville, but was also deployed at some time at Guadalcanal, Russel Island and New Georgia Island all in the Solomon Islands chain. There is no further documentation or records of the paintings that were sold and those that remained unsold. Several of these paintings were still in Darge's position when he sold his entire inventory to B.W. and Marlene Cruce, owners of the Southwest Gallery in Mesquite, Texas in approximately 1973. This transaction took place five years before he died, which partially answers some of the many questions of time and place, but with Fred Darge it never answers all the questions.

PAINTINGS BY FRED DARGE

July 2 - August 1, 1944

TITLE	MEDIUM	PRICE
1. "L. C. T. at Guadalcanal"	Watercolor	\$50.00
2. "Our Camp" (Guadalcanal)	"	25.00
3. "Native Village"	"	25.00
4. "Beach Along Guadalcanal"	" (Lent by Mr. J. Wagner)	
5. "Approaching Storm" (Guadalcanal)	"	25.00
6. "Beach Scene at Russel Island"	"	25.00
7. "Wash Day" (New Georgia Island)	"	25.00
8. "Night Guard" (New Georgia Island)	"	25.00
9. "On Patrol" (New Georgia Island)	"	25.00
10. "After a Hard Day's Work" (New Georgia Is.)	"	25.00
11. "Chow Line" (New Georgia Island)	"	25.00
12. "Sept. 14, 1943" (New Georgia Island)	"	25.00
13. "Bougainville Live Volcano" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
14. "The Swimming Hole" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
15. "Native Village" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
16. "L. C. T. Bringing Supplies" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
17. "L. C. T. Unloading Supplies (Bougainville)"	"	25.00
18. "L. C. T. Heading For a Supply Convoy" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
19. "Part of Empress Augusta Bay" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
20. "Native Village Along the Beach" (Bougainville)	"	25.00
21. "Yellow Beach No. 2" (Bougainville)	" (Lent by Mr. J. Wagner)	
22. "Unloading L. C. T." (Bougainville)	"	25.00
23. "Heading Home" (U. S. Army Transport)	"	25.00
24. "Resting" (U. S. Army Transport)	"	25.00
25. "Sailor on Watch" (U. S. Army Transport)	"	25.00
26. "U. S. Army Transport"	"	25.00

PAINTINGS BY FRED DARGE

TITLE	MEDIUM	PRICE
. "The Convoy"	Watercolor	\$25.00
. "U. S. Army Building a Bridge" (Bougainville)	"	50.00
. "Native Girl and Boy" (Bougainville)	OIL	30.00
. "Making a Beach Head" (Bougainville)	"	30.00
. "My Foxhole" (Bougainville)	"	30.00
. "Unloading L. C. T." (Bougainville)	"	30.00
. "Natives Bathing in River" (Bougainville)	"	30.00
. "U. S. Army Transport Unloading Supplies" (Bougainville)	"	50.00

List of Darge Paintings Exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art from July 2 – August 1, 1944, Courtesy of Dallas Museum of Art archives.



17. L. C. T. Unloading Supplies, Bougainville, 16" x 20", Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Ken and Elsie Duperry



21. Yellow Beach No. 2, Bougainville, Photograph Courtesy of 1stdibs.com



4. Beach Along Guadalcanal, Photograph Courtesy of 1stdibs.com



9. On Patrol, New Georgia Island, 16" x 20", Watercolor, Collection of Nanette Gordan