

WO Norm Hatch in 1945 (left) and Maj Norm Hatch, USMC (Ret) in a more recent photo. Hatch was the right Marine at the right time for some of the most historically significant events in U.S. Marine Corps history. Read “War Shots” to find out more.



COURTESY OF MAJ NORM HATCH, USMC (RET)



NANCY LEE WHITE HOFFMAN

Telling the Marine Corps Story in Wartime: “War Shots”

By Maj Robert T. Jordan, USMC (Ret)

“Along the way, the reader is treated to fresh details of the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima, as well as to issues concerning the very survival of the Marine Corps as one of our nation’s services in the aftermath of war.”

—Gen James L. Jones Jr.
32nd Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps
and former National Security Advisor to President Barack Obama

“**W**ar Shots” is the third in a series of books by Charles “Chip” Jones about Marines and the U.S. Marine Corps, beginning with his award-winning “Boys of ‘67” and followed by “Red, White and Yellow,” in which he explored the recent dynamics and tensions relating to civilian war combat correspondents and military they cover.

The former *Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch* staff reporter never served in the Marine Corps, but his years as a “service brat” in a Marine Corps family equips him well to be sensitive to how Marines think and to understand their esprit de corps and the full meaning of the Marine Corps motto: *Semper Fidelis*.

“War Shots” is, in part, a biography of retired Marine Mustang (former enlisted) Major Norm Hatch and the fellow combat photographers with whom he served during World War II. It also is a study in how those talented men prepared for and successfully captured the heroic still and motion-picture scenes that stirred

patriotic support at home and documented history for future generations. Jones weaves these themes together in a broad tapestry where the reader is treated to historical background that keeps the storyline in context, yet zooms in for close-up views of Hatch, his fellow photographers and the Marines slugging it out against determined foes in the Pacific.

Hatch is the perfect subject for Jones’ highly readable and dramatic story. Hatch joined the Marine Corps in 1939, before the Corps had realized the need to have cinematographers record actual fighting to use for training Marines. Hatch was in on the ground floor, helping create the occupational field. Today Hatch is an undisputed expert on still and motion-picture photography. His mind is sharp and encyclopedic when it comes to photographic history, and he still is spry at almost 90 years young, despite condescending to using a cane from time to time.

I first met Norm Hatch in 1978 at the Pentagon where he was in charge of the Department of Defense photographic archives. Despite his white hair, he looked younger than his then-58 years. I didn’t yet know about his exploits during WW II other than that he had served, was a recognized expert about military photography, that he had been a Marine and that he was someone I needed to get to know in my job as a media officer at Marine headquarters. He became one of my mentors—he helped me when I needed it and would humble me when I was wrong.

“War Shots” opens in 1943 aboard a warship churning through the dark waters of the mid-Pacific. On board the troopships and

escorts, Hatch was one of 18,088 U.S. Marines of the Second Marine Division.

Hatch and his assistant, Bill Kelliher, inventory their supplies: “Handheld 35 mm Bell & Howell camera.”

“Check.”

“Forty-five rolls of black-and-white film—each 100 feet long, totaling 4,500 feet of film.”

“Check.”

“Field pack.”

“Check.”

“.45-caliber pistol.”

“Check.”

The combat group unleashed salvo after salvo of 8-inch and 16-inch guns to suppress fire from Tarawa’s defenders and to hopefully soften their reinforced bunkers and pillboxes. Little did Hatch and the men of the 2dMarDiv then know that they were the vanguard of what some would later call the bloodiest battle of WW II. The men climbed down the cargo nets into amphibian tractors, and soon Staff Sergeant Hatch and his fellow photogs were viewing the battle close-up and personal through the cameras’ lenses.

Hatch was sickened by the carnage he witnessed as courageous men were torn apart by the entrenched enemy gunners. Yet, he managed to suppress his personal feelings by focusing his lens on the heroics of the moment. Day after day, contact after contact, as Hatch completed each 100-foot roll, he handed it to his assistant. Kelliher dutifully traded it for a new roll of film and then recorded the cinematographer’s name: “SSgt Norman T. Hatch.” Hatch focused on the scenes unfolding in front of him, carefully editing them “in-camera” to conserve film while documenting as much as possible.

Marine Captain James R. Stockman documented in the 1947 USMC historical monograph “The Battle for Tarawa,” that only one Japanese officer, 16 enlisted men and 129 Koreans were alive at the end of the battle. The 2dMarDiv suffered 894 (48 officers and 846 enlisted men) killed in action, with another 84 (eight officers and 76 enlisted men) later dying of their wounds. An additional 2,188 (102 officers and 2,086 enlisted men) were wounded. In 1948, Richard Johnston recorded in “Follow Me!” that, of the roughly 12,000 2dMarDiv Marines on Tarawa, 3,166 officers and men became casualties.

After the battle, Hatch was shipped to Hawaii where the division began refitting and training for the next engagement. But the battle casualties had shocked the American public. Two days after arriving in the islands, Hatch was summoned to Washington, D.C., along with some of his fellow photographers. Hatch, then 22 years old, was perplexed. Had they done something wrong? Didn’t the film turn out?

What happened was that Hatch’s film, along with some of the still photography, was scripted into a government-sponsored Hollywood movie, titled “With the Marines at Tarawa.” The U.S. Marine Corps was awarded an Academy Award for Best Documentary, Short Subject in 1945. Much of the footage was the 4,000 feet that Hatch shot, which featured an assault on a bunker by Marine First Lieutenant Alexander Bonnyman Jr., who was awarded posthumously the Medal of Honor. It also included the first images showing both Japanese and American troops engaged together.

Now that’s shooting it too close for comfort! Literally!

Admiral Chester W. Nimitz cited Hatch’s Navy Commendation Medal:

“For outstanding work as a motion picture photographer, cool-headedness under fire . . . He landed with the assault waves the first day, coolly taking pictures on the beaches and throughout the action, always at great risk of life and limb. Not only did he exhibit great personal bravery[,] but his work was such that authorities say the best combat pictures yet filmed during the war were obtained.”

Jones then chronicles Hatch’s experiences on Iwo Jima, where he was decorated for his actions with the Bronze Star medal, and his service on Saipan and during the occupation of Japan. It is all interesting reading. Jones’ extensive, meticulous research brings the war and that era to life.

Although the book is about photography, and there are black-and-white photos in it, it’s not a picture book that would look nice on your coffee table. It is about the courageous men who fought, and bled . . . and those who died fighting against huge odds for victory in the Pacific. And it’s about the men like Norm Hatch who took great personal risk in stride to document and preserve for our national heritage a few of the acts and the brav-

WO Norm Hatch (left), the photo officer for 5thMarDiv, and 1stLt Herb Schlosberg, the photo officer for 4thMarDiv, confer on Iwo Jima in late February 1945. (Photo courtesy of Maj Norm Hatch, USMC (Ret))

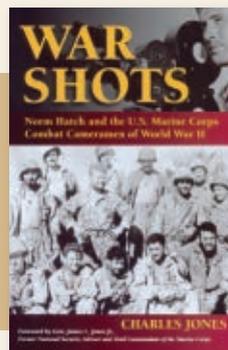


ery that typified the Marines who fought from island to island until the war was won.

Gen James L. Jones, the 32nd Commandant, sums it up well in his foreword:

“His is a story of patriotism, courage, loyalty, and a refreshing sense of honor. Our young people who are considering joining one of the Armed Services today would do well to read *War Shots*; our veterans will appreciate Charles Jones’ accurate treatment of the war that gave rise to the greatest generation.”

Editor’s note: Maj Bob Jordan, a former combat correspondent, founder of the Beirut Veterans of America, former Leatherneck associate editor and an honor graduate of the Syracuse Navy Photojournalism Program, is an instructor in public affairs and strategic communications at the Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, Md.



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