

Beltzner, Wesley K.

" , Donald

" , Clark

Local Coastguardsman Had Ringside Seat To Watch Saipan's Bloody Battle

JUL 31 1944

ABOARD A COAST GUARD-MANNED ASSAULT TRANSPORT IN PACIFIC WATERS (Delayed).—How he watched the bloody battle for Saipan from a ringside seat and dodged Jap planes in two air raids within 72 hours was told today by Wesley K. Beltzner, 23, son of Mrs. Flossie L. Beltzner, 627 Second Avenue, Bethlehem. He is an electrician's mate second class in the U. S. Coast Guard.

Beltzner and his shipmates watched the fight for the control of the Mariana Islands' major stronghold, which is only 1,300 miles from Tokio, from his battle station in the engine room at the main switchboard. He was formerly an electrician for the Bethlehem Steel Company.

"The Japs put up a bitter fight from the very first," he said. "Only a couple of hours after we had put troops from our ship ashore under heavy mortar fire, some of them were back aboard with bad wounds. We could tell by that stream of wounded evacuees in the next 72 hours that we had another Tarawa on our hands.

"Through glasses we could see tanks creeping up the hills engaging Jap tanks. They looked like beetles. Shells fell into the surf by the dozens and every once in awhile we saw a puff of black smoke and knew one of our boats or tanks had been hit.

"As we put out to sea the first night—we offered too much of a target to stay around after dark—four Jap bombers came over us. The air was filled with so much ack-ack it looked like a pin cushion. We gave them everything we had, but they were too high. The bombers got away, but they didn't have a chance to drop their loads.

TAKE INFANT ABOARD

The Coast Guardsmen told how a native woman of Saipan and her 10-day-old daughter were brought aboard for medical treatment and became favorites with everyone.

She was scared at first, but someone broke out a few words of Japanese and pretty soon she was smiling. It didn't take her long to come around after that. There was also a boy about eight years old, whom we called "Little Tojo." He never smiled or talked, and was serious as an owl. He had a bullet wound in the leg. But he ate ice cream for the first time and liked it, and we gave him a little brown dog one of the troops had left aboard. We put them ashore just before we left Saipan.

Beltzner participated in several Pacific invasions prior to Saipan, including Kiska in the Aleutians and Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. Two brothers, Donald, 25, and Clarke, 18, are serving in the U. S. Navy.

Jul 31, 1944