

PACIFIC GROWTH

E Q U I T I E S

John D. "Jack"
Wells, III

MR HACKNEY -

I wrote the
attached description of
what my uncle - Jack
Wells - did in WWI.
I believe it to be factual
but there may be some
omissions. The story at
the end is one that
my uncle told me.

Thank you for taking
the initiative to record

the World War II
experiences of "the
greatest generation" from
Nash County.

If you need it
modified or redone, let
me know.

Appreciatively

John Coleman
(my mother is Mary Alex
wells Coleman)

John "Jack" D. Wells III

US Army: Awarded Bronze Star Medal and Distinguished Unit Citation

Freshman Jack Wells left the University of North Carolina to enlist in the US Army in 1943. He volunteered for special duty and became an inaugural member of the 5307th Composite Unit (provisional)- better known as Merrill's Marauders after their commander, Gen. Frank Merrill. The Marauders were organized into two combat teams per battalion. In February 1944 the 5307th began a 750 mile march over the Himalayas and through jungle to Burma. Jack Wells was a radio operator and he and Pontoon, his Army mule, traveled every mile on foot. The assignment given the 5307th was to penetrate deeply into Japanese-held territory and force enemy troop contraction. They were sporadically supplied by US Air Corps drops but could not be relieved or reinforced.

In Burma they were outnumbered by the Japanese 18th division but inflicted heavy casualties. They harassed supply and communication lines and cut off the Japanese rear guard at Maingkwan. In March they severed Japanese supply lines in Hukawng Valley. On May 17 they helped Chinese troops capture Myitkina airfield; the town surrendered August 4.

The Marauders advanced 750 miles and fought in 5 major engagements (Walawbum, Shaduzup, Inkangahtawng, Nhpum Ga, and Myitkyina) and 32 skirmishes with the Japanese Army. They lost 700 men, only 1,300 Marauders remained at the capture of Myitkina and of these, 679 had to be hospitalized. While the Unit suffered over 100% casualties. Jack Wells was not physically wounded but like many he was afflicted with "dingue fever".

Jack kept many of his memories of close-in combat and the attendant casualties and excesses to himself but shared with family and friends the humorous and unusual antidotes of his intense experience. A favorite was the "Children's Fairy Tale":

The Japanese had radio "jamming " capabilities that could, in many of the mountainous locations, effectively preclude contact between the Unit and American bases. General Merrill was extremely anxious to receive radio information to US forces outside Burma but any attempt to contact airbases was cut short by Japanese radio interference. He eventually asked a radio operator to find an open frequency but not to attempt to transmit information until given the signal. The General, who was fluent in Japanese, began to tell, with great drama, a traditional Japanese Children's story. As the story built towards the well known but still exciting conclusion General Merrill took increasingly longer pauses. Toward the end, when Japanese radio "jammers" were likely caught up in the drama of the story they knew from childhood, General Merrill signaled Jack Wells to broadcast the necessary coordinates to the Air Corps bases. The Japanese did not catch on quickly enough and necessary information was successfully broadcast.