

...story appeared in a detail about the
most newspaper accounts of the Ryukyus campaign have been centered
around Okinawa, with hardly any mention of Ie Shima.

HELL-SPIKE BATTLE BLOODIER THAN TARAWA
IE SHIMA VICTORY NEW PACIFIC SAGA
5,000 JAPS RAINED SHELLS DOWN ON
BRAVE 77TH: ERNIE PYLE DIED THERE

*Left Chosen My
Scrap Book - Kim*

Washington - Japan shivered this week as Mac Arthur's medium bombers roared in from Okinawa's air fields - and you can give a lot of credit to New York's own 77th division and the forgotten battle for a hell spike off the coast. Details of the affair have just become known here.

The hell spike was a rocky pinnacle on Ie Shima, which the 77th took after a furious five-day conflict - The battle in which Ernie Pyle died.

And it's important, because it cleared the way for the air support which backed up the attack on nearby Okinawa. It gave Gen Simon B. Buckner's 10th army a good airbase, from which the fighter planes and bombers were able to get at Okinawa when the latter looked doubtful. And this little known battle proved to be one of the toughest of the entire Pacific war.

Ie Shima thus goes down with Kwajalein and Iwo Jima as one of the three key stepping stones that cleared the way for our advance from the Marshall Islands to Tokyo's front yard. And it was just about as tough as either of those much better publicized battles. Ie Shima was overlooked because of the bigger battle raging next door, but it was a mighty tough nut to crack. The toughest part was the hell-spike, a young mountain 607 feet high, packed with three story pill-boxes and rising behind a village of concrete houses which had been converted into artillery emplacements. The whole thing constituted a formidable fortress, connected by tunnels and held by 5,000 fanatical Japs. They defended it house-by-house, cave-by-cave, and pillbox-by-pillbox. And they had plenty of artillery, mortars, and anti-tank guns.

That's what the 77th walked into when it landed on Ie Shima last April 15th. The 77th had orders to clear out the island so we could use it's first class airbase. The tough fighting Japs still barred us from the three best of Okinawa's five airfields. We had to get more planes in the air to relieve the pressure over the Ryukyus and Ie Shima was the best bet. The 77th was commanded by Maj. Gen. A.D. Bruce, the father of America's tank destroyers. Bruce himself has been a tough, fearless, fighting man in two wars and Ernie Pyle came with him to see what turned out to be one of the fiercest battles yet fought.

The Japs were clever. They ~~xx~~ had everything camouflaged and the garrison had remained under cover for an entire month trying to fool us into a trap. They even staged a show of weak resistance at the best western beach so that we could break through and come storming into that hornet's nest. The 77th landed on the 15th and took the airfield on the morning of the 16th. Then it pressed on cautiously and ran into the hornet's nest that afternoon. A dirty, bloody struggle instantly developed, with the Japs on the peak looking down the throats of the attackers.

They came out fighting that night. They sneaked through the lines, hacking and stabbing the men in the fox holes and 155 of them with explosives tied to their backs were killed in a single sector. But the 77th beat them off and went forward the next morning.

It didn't go very fast for the next two days, inching it's bloody way forward amid a hail of fire through what proved to be 1,200 mines. Snipers were concealed everywhere and it was one of them that killed Ernie Pyle on the 18th. But the Americans crept and crawled slowly forward.

By April 19th Gen. Bruce issued his General Order No. 56. It read simply: "Ie Shima is captured. Thank you, tough guys."