

1945 September 10-16

"Another Marine Reporting, Sir"

DeClute, Taking Part In Four South Pacific Battles With 3rd Marines, Is Given Discharge



—Tribune Photo
PFC. MARSHALL DE CLUTE

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 September 16, page 14)

Private First Class Marshall De Clute was back in La Crosse in September 1945 after being discharged from the United States Marine Corps on September 6 at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. He was believed to be the first La Crosse marine to be discharged under the point system for the demobilization of the armed forces as World War II was ending. His 87 points, mostly accumulated from four campaigns in the Pacific Theater, were his ticket home.¹

Marshall Miller De Clute was born in Milwaukee on December 2, 1918, to Silas Jacob De Clute.² His grandparents, as well as his father, were born in Michigan, but they were living in Chicago in

1900.³ By 1910, twenty-one-year-old Silas De Clute was a fireman and living with his wife, Natalie, in Chicago.⁴

Sometime In the intervening 25 years, the family moved to La Crosse.

In 1935, Silas De Clute took a job as chief engineer for La Crosse Breweries, Inc.⁵ By 1940, Marshall's parents had split up. Silas, now 50 years old, and his new wife, 30-year-old Henrietta, were living at 1234 Farnam Street in La Crosse with an eight-year-old son named William.⁶ By April 1942, they had moved to 2211 Winnebago Street.⁷

Marshall De Clute was living on his own at 914 Market Street and employed as an "assembler."⁸ He was working for Trane Company.⁹

When Marshall De Clute registered for the Selective Service in October 1940, he was five feet, nine-and-one-half inches tall, and weighed just 136 pounds.¹⁰

Despite his less than imposing physique, De Clute enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve on April 27, 1942. After basic training in San Diego, California, he went overseas to New Zealand on February 15, 1943. After five-and-one-half months of training in New Zealand, his unit went to Guadalcanal, which was the base for the 3rd Marine Division.¹¹

De Clute was a member of the signal company [communications] in the [headquarters battalion](#) of the [3rd Marine Division](#).¹²



3rd Marine Division shoulder patch
(MilitaryVetsPX.com)

His first action with the 3rd Division was the invasion of [Bougainville](#) in the Solomon Islands in November 1943.¹³



(U.S. Army Center of Military History)

[Bougainville](#) was the northernmost of the Solomon Islands. With mountainous terrain covered by dense jungle, [Bougainville](#) was strategic because it was home to five Japanese airfields. The Americans wanted airfields on the island because it would put them within 210 miles of the huge Japanese base of Rabaul. The 3rd Marine Division landed on November 1 against light opposition because of a Marine Raider landing on nearby Choiseul Island a week earlier that diverted Japanese troops. The Marines, along with the Army's 37th Infantry Division, fought a grueling campaign until December 28th when they turned over mopping up duties to the Army. The 3rd Marine Division had suffered 423 killed and 1,418 wounded on [Bougainville](#).¹⁴

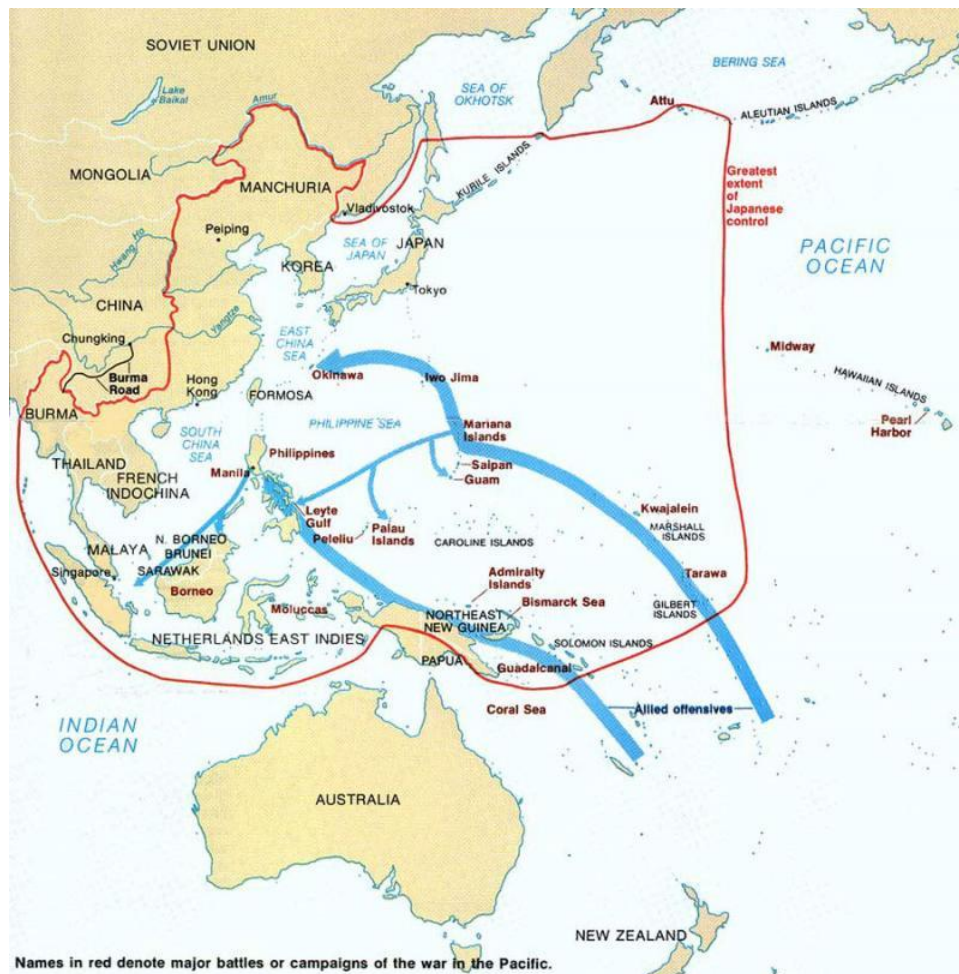
After returning to Guadalcanal in January 1944, De Clute's unit started planning and training for their next operations. They left Guadalcanal on June 2-3 to be part of the floating reserve force for the invasion of Saipan, and they remained on their ships from June 15-28 without being put ashore.¹⁵

Saipan was part of the campaign in the Marianas to gain air bases on [Saipan](#), [Tinian](#), and Guam for B-29 bomber attacks on Japan.¹⁶

The next objective of the Marines of the 3rd Division was the island of [Guam](#). Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, 153 lightly-armed Marines on the remote island of [Guam](#) were

overwhelmed by almost 6,000 Japanese.¹⁷ The Marines of the 3rd Division landed on [Guam](#) on July 21, 1944, intent on avenging that loss.¹⁸ During his interview with the *La Crosse Tribune*, De Clute said :

The landing at Guam was my toughest assignment as we suffered about 40 per cent casualties when we came under heavy mortar barrages July 21, 1944 . . . We circled about for about an hour under heavy fire waiting for the go-ahead signal to land and then our actual landing operations took about 20 minutes before we made the 1,500-yard advance on the beach dodging mortar fire from all directions.¹⁹



The Pacific Theater in World War II
(NCpedia)

Along with the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade and the Army's 77th Division, the 3rd Marine Division took Guam from its 18,000 Japanese defenders in 20 days at the cost of 8,000 casualties. Guam became the base for two B-29 airfields.²⁰ De Clute's unit remained on Guam until February 1945.²¹

[Iwo Jima](#) was the last battle for De Clute and his unit. The 4th and 5th Marine Divisions landed on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945.²² The 3rd Marine Division was in reserve, and the casualties suffered by their comrades necessitated their commitment to the battle on February 24. The slow advance was marked by hellish combat against the well-entrenched Japanese defenders whose mission was to die fighting. The 3rd Division made the final attack of the battle on March 16 to secure the island. Army units relieved the Marines on April 4, 1945.²³ In five weeks of fighting, the three Marine divisions had suffered more than 25,000 casualties; of those, almost 7,000 were killed in action. The 18,000 Japanese defenders were almost wiped out.²⁴ Marshall De Clute remarked that the two Marine Corps cemeteries on Iwo Jima were beautiful.²⁵

De Clute also recalled how he and his fellow Marines had lived in their foxholes on both Guam and Iwo Jima because they were under constant attack.²⁶

While Marshall De Clute was fighting with the Marines in the Pacific Theater, his family was making contributions to the war effort in different ways.

His brother, Harry, was a corporal in the Army Quartermaster Corps in England.²⁷

His father, Silas J. De Clute, was a member of the Coast Guard Reserve in La Crosse.²⁸ That is until he took a leave of absence from his job at La Crosse Breweries to enlist in the United States Merchant Marine in August 1943 at the age of 52. Silas De Clute was assigned to a boat on the Great Lakes for the duration of the war.²⁹

His mother, Natalie De Clute, was the first block worker in La Crosse to get every household on her block to buy extra war bonds during the Fifth War Loan drive in June 1944. Her block was "between Farnam and Park, between 15th and 16th."³⁰



(La Crosse Tribune, 1944 June 27, page 5)

Following Iwo Jima, De Clute's unit returned to Guam. The 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Marine Divisions were slated to be part of the invasion force attacking Kyushu, Japan about November 1, 1945.³¹ The atomic bombings in early August 1945 and the subsequent surrender of Japan canceled "Operation Olympic."

During World War II, the Marine Corps has lost 19,733 men killed in action or died of wounds and had 67,207 wounded.³² There would be no more.

Instead of risking his life against the Japanese again, Marshall De Clute returned to his wife, the former Janice Ginsky, who was living with her parents at 1240 Farnam Street.³³

Marine Corps veteran Marshall De Clute settled into postwar life. He and Janice bought property on Cass Street between 10th and 11th streets.³⁴ Marshall, who took up the plumber's trade, installed water lines to the new lodge at Camp Ehawee as part of a volunteer work day for fathers of Girl Scouts.³⁵ He and his wife had two daughters and a son. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge in La Crosse.³⁶

But some difficult times came later. He and his wife, Janice, split up sometime after 1959.³⁷ In August 1960, Marshall De Clute declared bankruptcy.³⁸

On January 29, 1961, he married Bernice A. Witzke in Winnebago County, California.³⁹ She had a son and a daughter.⁴⁰

They apparently decided to make a fresh start in California. In 1962, they were living in San Mateo, California.⁴¹ Marshall became a member of the American Legion Post in Redwood City, California. By 1991, Marshall had retired from plumbing, and they were living in Pleasanton, California.⁴²

On May 29, 1991, Marshall De Clute died in a hospital at Livermore, California, at the age of 72. Funeral services were in La Crosse on June 15, and he was buried at Mormon Coulee Memorial Park Cemetery.⁴³



(Findagrave.com)

Could there be a more fitting epitaph for a veteran's life than what was inscribed on a cross in the Marine Corps cemetery on Guadalcanal:

And when he goes to Heaven
To Saint Peter he will tell:
Another Marine reporting, Sir;
I've served my time in hell!⁴⁴

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Sources & Notes:

¹ "DeClute, Taking Part In Four South Pacific Battles with 3rd Marines, Is Given Discharge," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 September 16, page 14. His last name is shown as "DeClute" or "De Clute" at various times. This article focuses on Bougainville, Guam, and Iwo Jima; De Clute also had a battle star for operations in the Northern Solomon Islands.

² The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System*, 147; Box: 141; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 September 19). Later sources list his birth year as 1919.

³ 1900 U.S. census, Chicago, Illinois, population schedule, Chicago, p. 5, dwelling 47, family 88, Silas and Phoebe De Clute; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 19); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 1854.

⁴ 1910 U.S. census, Chicago, Illinois, population schedule, Chicago, p. 18A, family 175, Silas and Natalie DeClute; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 19); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 256.

⁵ "Silas DeClute Joins U.S. Merchant Marine," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1943 August 22, page 7.

⁶ 1940 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 12A, dwelling 1224, family 261, Silas and Henrietta De Clute; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 19); citing NARA microfilm publication T627, roll 4490. William could have been Henrietta's son from a previous marriage.

⁷ U.S., *World War II Draft Cards of Young Men, 1940-1947*.

⁸ "U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995," *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 19); citing La Crosse, Wisconsin, City Directory, 1939.

⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.

¹⁰ U.S., *World War II Draft Cards of Young Men, 1940-1947*.

¹¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.

¹² National Archives in Washington, D. C., *U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1798-1958*, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, Record Group 127, microfilm T977, image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 19). He is listed in the same unit on Muster Rolls dated October 1942, January 1943, October 1943, July 1944.

¹³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.

¹⁴ Col. Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret.), *A Fellowship of Valor: The Battle History of the United States Marines* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 120-125.

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- ¹⁵ "History of Headquarters Battalion," *The Third Marine Division Association*, 1998, <http://www.caltrap.org/history/hqbattalion.asp>.
- ¹⁶ Alexander, 186.
- ¹⁷ Alexander, 76-77.
- ¹⁸ "History of Headquarters Battalion."
- ¹⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.
- ²⁰ Alexander, 186-189.
- ²¹ "History of Headquarters Battalion."
- ²² Alexander, 206.
- ²³ "History of Headquarters Battalion."
- ²⁴ David Vergun, "Marines Landed on Iwo Jima 75 Years Ago," *U.S. Department of Defense*, 2020 February 19, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/story/Article/2051094/marines-landed-on-iwo-jima-75-years-ago/>.
- ²⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.
- ²⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.
- ²⁷ "Wins Contest In Bond Drive," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 June 27, page 5.
- ²⁸ "Volunteer Group Aids War Effort," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 April 23, page 3.
- ²⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1943 August 22.
- ³⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 June 27.
- ³¹ "History of Headquarters Battalion."
- ³² Alexander, 395.
- ³³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 16.
- ³⁴ "Real Estate Transfers," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1946 September 4, page 11.
- ³⁵ "Dads Give Girl Scouts Helping Hand," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1954 May 5, page 2.
- ³⁶ "Marshall M. DeClute," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1991 June 12, page B-5.
- ³⁷ *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995*.
- ³⁸ "Three Bankruptcy Petitions To Be Heard," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1960 August 24, page 21.
- ³⁹ "Winnebago County, Illinois, Marriages, 1836-1962," *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 19), transcription, "Winnebago County Clerk Genealogy Records," crediting Winnebago County clerk.
- ⁴⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1991 June 12.
- ⁴¹ *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995*.
- ⁴² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1991 June 12.
- ⁴³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1991 June 12.
- ⁴⁴ Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal, August 1942-February 1943* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001), Preface, page x.