

Luther Leru “Dusty” Rhodes

Private First Class – U.S.M.C.

Killed in Action/Missing in Action on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands on 7 October 1942



	Purple Heart	Combat Action Ribbon	
American Campaign Medal	Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal	WWII Victory	



1st Marine Division

Rhodes was born in Edneyville, Henderson County, NC on 22 Mar 1924. He served in the United States Marine Corps, L Company, Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division. He was killed in action Oct. 7, 1942, at the Battle of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. His body was not recovered.



R E S T R I C T E D

HEADQUARTERS
AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE
(PACIFIC ZONE)
APO 958

BOARD PROCEEDINGS)

NUMBER 850)

PROCEEDINGS OF BOARD PROCEEDINGS

1. The Board of Review convened on 14 January 1949 pursuant to Par 2b, Special Orders 122, Headquarters, American Graves Registration Service, Pacific Zone, APO 958, dated 13 December 1948. (Exhibit A)

2. Summary

a. Personnel involved (AGRS-PAZ Case No. 7283)

RHODES, Luther Leru PFC 327928 USMC

b. Private First Class Rhodes was killed in action on 7 October 1942 at the Matanikau River, Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands and reported buried in the First Marine Division Cemetery, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. (Exhibit B)

c. Subject's Form 371 has been compared by the Identification Branch with unidentified remains from the Solomon Islands Area with negative results.

d. A complete check by crosses of the cemetery on Guadalcanal was made by the members of the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company on 13 August 1947. A later check of the cemetery roster and of all battle areas was made but the remains of subject decedent could not be found. (Exhibit C)

e. Records of this headquarters do not show that subject remains have been recovered.

3. Findings

After careful consideration of all the facts involved, the Board unanimously resolved that subject decedent be declared non-recoverable.

3 Exhibits

- A - SO #122, AGRS-PAZ, 13 Dec 48
- B - Form 371
- C - Rpt of Inv

R. E. Hollister
R. E. HOLLISTER
Major, USAF
President

R. D. Johnson
R. D. JOHNSON
Captain, USAF
Member

Cyril C. Disney
CYRIL C. DISNEY
1st Lt, FA
Recorder

R E S T R I C T E D

Encl 12

COMPANY "L", THIRD BATTALION, FIFTH MARINES,
FIRST MARINE DIVISION, FLEET MARINE FORCE,
C/O POSTMASTER, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

13 October, 1942.

INVENTORY OF THE PERSONAL EFFECTS OF PRIVATE FIRST CLASS
LUTHER L. RHODES, (327928) USMC, DECEASED:

1 Purse, containing the following articles:

- 1 Drivers license
- 9 Photographs
- 1 Piece Chinese money, paper (50 cents)
- 1 Subpoena, Royal Domain

John E. Flaherty
JOHN E. FLAHERTY,
2dLt., U.S.M.C.R.,
Company Officer.

#57



For these 14 young men, Armistice Day became the day on which they joined the United States Marine Corps, a fighting unit which has seen service all over the world during its 166 years of life. Capt. John M. Greer, officer-in-charge of the Marine Recruiting Station here, is at the left. The recruits, who go to Parris Island, S. C., today for training, are, left to right, front row, John D. York, 17, of Brevard; Boyle P. Flowers, 23, of Morganton; Hobart B. Cook, 18, of Robinsville; Julius H. Yelton, Jr., 17, of Hendersonville; Edward W. Collins, 17, of Asheville, and Marvin C. Sexton, 17, Luther L. Rhodes, 17, and Ralph E. Owens, 17, all of Henderson; and back row, Martin B. Martin, 22, of Ellenboro, Wes Banks, 21, of Candler, James C. Justice, Jr., of Fletcher; Charles H. Brown, 22, of High Point; James Haney, 17, of Asheville, and Lee E. Rhodes, Jr., 17, of Henderson.

AUG 8 1946

July 25 1946

Hendersonville, N.C.

R#2 Box 127.

Commandant of the Marine Corps
Washington, D.C.



PGM

In reply to your letter of July 16 it is
with deep sorrow we read the news that the
remains of our dead Son ^{serial} PFC. Luther L. Rhode. 327928
has not been located as we hope to to
have his body returned to to his beloved
Land the U.S.A. for his final resting place.
Thank you and if further information is obtained
concerning his remains please do not hesitate
to notify us we remain yours truly

Mr & Mrs. Harley B Rhodes.

RECEIVED

AUG 30 1946

RECEIVED
DIVISION OF
WAR RELATION



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
2008 ELLIOT ROAD
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA 22134-5103

IN REPLY REFER TO:
3040
MFPC
18 Sep 17

Mr. Marvin T. Rhodes
754 Rhodes Road
Hendersonville, NC 28972

Dear Mr. Rhodes,

At the Charleston, South Carolina Family Member Update on 25 February 2017, you asked several questions regarding your brother's case; Private First Class (PFC) Luther Rhodes, USMC, WWII. The DPAA Analyst provided the following response:

Mr. Rhodes asked for a plan/sketch of engagement lines of his brother's unit; Company L, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment; at Guadalcanal on November 7, 1942, and to have it overlaid on a current map. Unfortunately, no plan or sketch with locations of company size units exists. Despite this, our analysts have surmised through historical documents that the area described in paragraph two of the "Circumstances of Loss" section of the attached case summary, as well as depicted in "Figure 7" is where his brother's company was on November 7, 1942. If such a plan or sketch ever is found, our analysts will add it to his brother's case summary.

Additionally, an explanation of the location of where Private Kasel's ID tag was found and has been added to the "Current Investigations" section of the case summary.

We hope you find this information helpful. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, Chuck Williams or Mike Ryba at 1-800-847-1597.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Y. Johnson", is written over the typed name.

H. Y. JOHNSON
Head, POW/MIA Section
By direction of the
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Eyewitness report of Rhodes' death:

[PFC Larry "Hardrock"] Gerkin and I stood in the middle of a battlefield, the battle now ended, but the blood, death, moans, dismembered bodies, and general ugliness were all around us.... I saw Dusty Rhodes' corporal and squad leader coming toward us. He spoke to Gerk.

"Larry, I've been looking for you."

"Oh?" Gerk said. "How's the kid?"

"That's why I came over here, Gerk," the corporal said. "I wanted you to know the kid got hit last night."

"How bad?" Gerkin asked. "Will he be okay?"

"Look, Larry," the corporal said. "It was dark, all hell was busting loose, and I don't know *what* the hell happened." He stopped talking for a second, then said, "He's dead, Larry – and I just wanted to tell you personally."

Gerkin didn't say anything. He lowered his head and kicked at the dirt a couple times. He didn't say anything at all, and I didn't say anything either. There was nothing I could tell him. The only decent thing I could do was keep quiet and leave Gerk alone.

Finally, Gerk looked up again and asked the corporal, "Where is he? Where's the kid?"

"He's over here a little way," the corporal said.

Gerkin looked at me. "I'm gonna go take a look at him, Ore."

"Okay, Larry," I said. "Go ahead – No, wait. I'll go with you."

So we followed the corporal over to where his squad was situated, and as we got there, we saw the kid's body.

Gerkin choked up and let out a sob. There in front of us, in the midst of all the dead and wounded, two men from the 2nd Platoon were rolling Dusty onto a poncho. My thought then, and my vivid memory sixty years later, was how white Dusty's light blond hair looked as they wrapped him in the poncho.

Gerkin pulled himself together and went directly to the two men who were getting ready to take the kid's body away. He said to them, "Don't drop that kid while you're moving him in that poncho. Don't bump him on the ground, or I'll kick the shit out of both of you."

"Okay, Gerk," one of them said quietly. "Don't worry. We'll take good care of him."

Larry wandered off somewhere, and it was about thirty minutes before he showed up again. I never heard him mention the kid again or say anything about him. Not ever. I understood his silence perfectly. It was the only way you could keep on going and keep yourself from cracking up altogether. Death was everywhere, but to keep going, we had to push the dead out of our thoughts. And from that day on, I never heard anyone mention Dusty Rhodes' name in Larry Gerkin's presence....

Ore J. Marion, *On The Canal: The Marines of L/3/5 on Guadalcanal, 1942*; also Geoffrey W. Roecker, *Leaving Mac Behind: The Lost Marines of Guadalcanal*, p. 43.

Summary of Luther Rhodes service with the U.S. Marine Corps

Luther Rhodes enlisted in the Marine Corps on November 11, 1941, at the age of 17. After boot camp at Parris Island, SC, he was assigned to L Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines at New River (now Camp Lejeune) North Carolina. In late May 1942, he deployed to New Zealand and prepared for the invasion of Guadalcanal. Rhodes was part of the D-Day invasion of the island on August 7, 1942, the first land battle of American forces in WWII. The invasion was unopposed, and his unit captured Henderson Field the next day. However, between August 8 and the time of his death, October 7, Rhodes engaged with the Japanese in constant combat actions which included what became known as “Bloody Ridge” and the Matanikau River battles, the last of which resulted in his death. Rhodes’ unit remained on Guadalcanal until November of 1942.

Rhodes’ time on Guadalcanal is written about in two books. The first is Ore J. Marion’s *On The Canal: The Marines of L/3/5 on Guadalcanal, 1942*, published in 2004 and Geoffrey W. Roecker’s *Leaving Mac Behind: The Lost Marines of Guadalcanal*, published in 2019. Both books have a photograph of Rhodes.

On the Canal was written by Ore Marion, a sergeant in Rhodes’ company and describes L company’s action during their time on Guadalcanal. Description of Rhodes in the book relates that he was given the nickname “Dusty” and also, “the Kid.” It also (above) related the circumstances of his death and the esteem his fellow Marines held in him.

Leaving Mac Behind is focused on the approximate 400 Marines who fought on Guadalcanal whose remains were not recovered or were listed as “unknown.” It discussed the chaotic difficulties associated with leaving dead Marines in temporary graves during battles and the problems with later recovering bodies that quickly disintegrated under tropical jungle conditions and on rugged terrain. Adding to the problems of accounting for the dead was the late arrival of graves registration units and the poor condition of the bodies after weeks or months in hastily constructed graves. Making this even more difficult was the disinterment of all buried in the 1st Marine Division cemetery in 1948 and moved either to the States or in cemeteries in Hawaii or the Philippines. Since then, there has been vast development of Guadalcanal where much of the battlefields were subsumed by new buildings and infrastructure. Still, remains are occasionally found on Guadalcanal.

Also, in *Leaving Mac Behind* are three letters to and from Rhodes’ parents. The first, dated July 16, 1946, was written by Marine Captain Edwin C. Clarke to Rhodes’ parents, related that they were unable to recover Rhodes’ remains. The second letter dated July 25, 1946, from Rhodes’ parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harley B. Rhodes to the Commandant of the Marines Corps in Washington, DC mentioned the July 16, 1946, letter and related that “with deep sorrow we read the news that the remains of our dead son” have not been located and added the hope that he could be “returned to his beloved Land the U.S.A. for his final resting place.” A copy of this letter is above.

A third letter dated August 11, 1946, to Mr. Harley and Mrs. Rhodes from Marine Lieutenant Colonel D. Routh mentions the July 25 letter and relates that “this office received a report that your son was buried the 1st Marine Division Cemetery on Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands. However, a recheck was recently made of the cemetery and I regret to inform you that no record was found of his grave.” Routh continued stating, “it may be that your son’s remains could not be identified at the time of interment and were of necessity buried among the unidentified in one of the military cemeteries.” Routh goes on and describes the difficulty of identifying the dead and finished

the letter by stating, “I can understand your desire to have your son’s remains recovered and any further information obtained will be forwarded to you.”



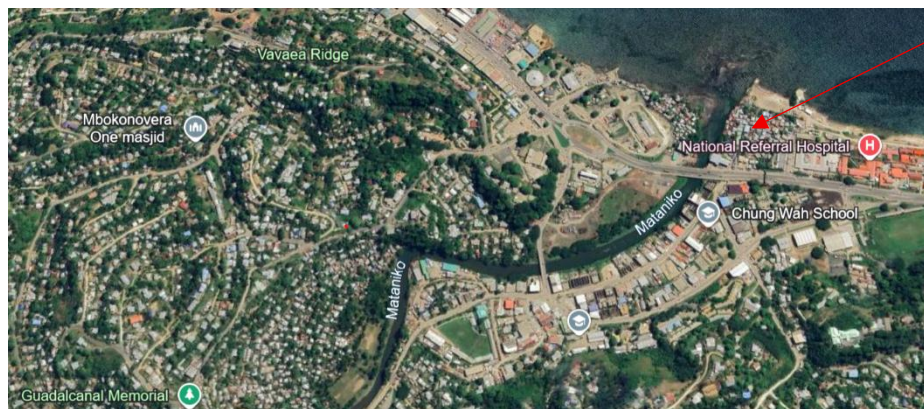
Luther’s boyhood home on Rhodes Road (in 2025)



Luther’s parents Harley and Mrs. Rhodes



Luther’s brother Marvin in July 2025



Guadalcanal in July 2025 in the vicinity of where Rhodes was killed. See red arrows. During the war, all of this was jungle.