CHAPTER 5

THE LAST DAYS OF OUR PLATOON (6 AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1944)

On the night of 6 August 1944, we left the Fena farm for Agana where we believed that our Division Headquarters were situated. We were intending to go there via the east coast of the island and Pago near the central east coast. This was because there was a rumour that the Japanese forces were concentrating in Pago.

In reality, according to the official history of the war, following the all-out attack from Fonte Hill and Aoba Hill on 25 July 1944, the surviving Japanese forces had moved into mountains on the northern part of the island. On 11 August 1944, the Force Commander Obata of the 31st Army committed suicide and the entire island fell under US control.1 By that time, those Japanese who had been driven into the northernmost part of the island, including women and children who had been unable to return to Japan and were subsequently forcefully employed by the military authorities, had thrown themselves one after another from the top of a cliff into the ocean. Adults could have made up their mind when the circumstances required them to die, even if they did not wish to do so. However, it is too painful to think that they committed suicide with their young children who did not understand anything. What a tragedy it was. Having heard about this episode when I returned to Japan, I feel very sad.

Our departure from Fena was six days before the official end of the Japanese resistance, which I have just described. However, we had no way of knowing about these facts at the time.
When we set out from Fena, I asked Platoon Commander Inaba to take Private First Class Ito with me. The private was otherwise to stay behind in the farm as he had been wounded. But he was a batman of the ill-disciplined drunkard, Corporal Horiba. Because Ito had been suffering so much under the rough hands of Horiba, I pitied Ito.

‘May I please bring him with us, Sir?’ The platoon commander said OK to my request.

However, when we came to a forked road on the way, the private received an order to go back to the Fena farm to make contact with the senior officers remaining there.

‘Look! Make sure to take the correct way.’ I made doubly sure by saying ‘we are going to go straight down this road. Are you with me? OK?’

Unfortunately, Ito never came back. Perhaps he went the wrong way in the dark or got lost. This episode, too, was very painful for me.

Since there was no enemy in sight, we walked under the starlight along the 13 feet (4 metres)-wide in-camp road, which we had built before the US invasion. I was still suffering from diarrhoea. Therefore, when I carried a rifle and a haversack on my shoulder and bullets and grenades from my belt, I was unsteady on my feet. I began to walk with a bamboo stick picked up on the way, and felt compelled all the way to keep up with my other colleagues. Each of our sappers carried only a rifle, two haversacks and an overcoat. Above all, strong men had been recruited to be sappers. Therefore, they walked very fast.

‘Pago has been seized by the Americans’, the sappers then informed us, ‘who are now mopping up the surrounding areas.’ We thought it suicidal to go to Pago, and changed our mind to go instead to a village called Talofofo at the mouth of the main stream of the River Talofofo on the east coast. (Who knew at that time that later I was to live near a stream which was a tributary of the River Talofofo?) By that time, an unknown number of our colleagues had already gone missing. Our procession was increasingly elongated. Soon, we ran out of food regretting the destruction of our provisions depot.