



RICHARD SATTERLEE WILLIS

1942

Richard Willis entered the Second Form in 1937. Powerful of frame, his red hair symbolic of the fighting courage that characterized him even as a small boy, he soon became a mainstay of Isthmian first teams and he won his S.P.S. in football, hockey and baseball. He also excelled at throwing the javelin. In his Sixth Form year, he was Treasurer of the Athletic Association, Chairman of the Chest Committee and a Supervisor. Graduating in 1942, he went to Yale, but left college in January, 1943, to enlist in the Marine Corps. After three months at Parris Island and New River, he was assigned as machine-gunner to the 23rd Marine Regiment, received further training at Camp Pendleton, California, and went overseas.

There follow excerpts from some of his letters to his mother:

"(January 15, 1944, aboard a transport in the Pacific) Life goes on as usual and your son is still enjoying it as everything is going well. Really haven't anything to write of interest as that all goes under the head of military knowledge. . . . Our accommodations are luxurious. If I turn over it is on someone else and only two guys besides myself are not seasick. Thought you would appreciate a note however dull. (February 19, on the Island of Maui, Hawaii) I have just come back from the invasion of the Marshall Islands, namely Roi Island on Kwajalein Atoll and find I have no love for Hirohito's sons. It is quite an exciting game this war, very little different from a football game, only for slightly higher stakes. There are still the same victory parties afterwards,—with Jap beer and saki. . . . I'm safe and unscathed and

broadened by newly acquired experiences. You will never know how wonderful it is to know that I can take it. (June 5, on board ship) Excuse the long delay between letters but I had an experience which stripped me of all my belongings except for what I was wearing, a pair of pants, and since then have been on my way to combat. Really have loads of news to tell you but as usual it all comes under the head of military knowledge. . . . Am well and happy though which makes up for the trivial hardships encountered. (July 16) I suppose you know I have been on Saipan, which was a gay party and the cause of a slight perforation in my left arm, but I am as good as new now and ready for the next attack. Have only had one letter in two months, as I was in the hospital for some time and all my mail got turned back. Excuse dull letter, am not allowed to tell you anything, don't worry. I am all right and very lucky. (August 15) I am now on Tinian and everything is pretty well secured. It was not as bad as Saipan, . . . but it is going to get tougher and tougher out here until the breaking point. I hope you realize that my wound was very slight, never touched the bone. Can't tell you any more. I guess I am stuck out here for quite some time but everything is rosy and I am well so have nothing to complain about. I have been getting your letters regularly even in the field where I have to keep down to read them. The main thing I want now is chow and more chow and loads of rest. We have all each lost about thirty pounds these last two months."

Willis had gone into Saipan on D-Day, H-hour. He was wounded the next day, June 15, and taken on board a hospital ship as a walking casualty, but jumped ship after three days, rejoined his regiment and fought for a week, until he got blood poisoning. That obliged him to go back to the hospital ship for about ten days, but he returned to the regiment again in time for the first assault on Tinian. In September he was taken ill with a combination of dengue fever, dysentery and jaundice. His letters were cheerful, full of fun, and of the soft life he was leading in the hospital, where he remained till early December.

His unit landed on Iwo Jima, February 19—again on D-Day, H-hour—in amphibious tanks. Only one man in his squad got through without injury. Willis himself died of wounds, March 6, 1945.