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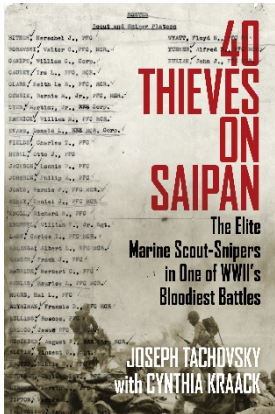
June 2, 2020

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Son Discovers Father Was an Elite WWII Marine

*“... the Scout-Sniper boys spent more time behind the Jap lines than our own.”—Commander Glenn English,
U.S. Navy Sixth Marines Chief Surgeon*



Washington, D.C.—“Uncommon valor was a common virtue” in the Pacific Theatre, and **40 Thieves on Saipan: The Elite Marine Scout-Snipers in One of WWII's Bloodiest Battles** is the untold story of an especially valor-filled and daredevil gang of Marines.

Joseph Tachovsky knew his father was a Marine, but it was not until his father's funeral that he discovered Lieutenant Tachovsky (“Ski”) was commanding officer of the elite scout-snipers nicknamed the “Forty Thieves.” These top men were chosen for their willingness to defy rules and beat all comers. When Marines got into fights, the loser went to the hospital, and the winner went in the brig—Lieutenant “Ski” invited the winners into his band of Thieves.

Written by the son of their daring leader, **40 Thieves on Saipan** is the thrilling story of the men whose unique skills in stealth and deadly hand-to-hand combat helped gain a critical victory in the battle for Saipan—Emperor Hirohito's “Treasure.” Joseph wove together this inspiring narrative from exhaustive interviews with the surviving Thieves, mementos from his father, and extensive documentary records.

These crafty, full-blooded Marines did not fight using ordinary measures:

- Lieutenant “Ski” saved his men from a tank banzai attack by charging into the open and unleashing a bazooka on it on—a bazooka grabbed from another Marine team bivouacked nearby
- The Black Death technique of silent killing, hand-to-hand combat, and back-alley tactics were taught and encouraged—allowing them to go undetected when scouting behind enemy lines
- Buckets filled with rusty shrapnel became short-fused bombs to clear out Japanese foxholes
- Molotov cocktails were improvised from empty bottles and stolen gasoline and used to destroy Japanese tanks—this idea was inspired by a radio program one of the men heard back in the States
- Cloth caps and sneakers became their stealth scouting uniforms—replacing the more protective but noisy metal helmets and combat boots

40 Thieves on Saipan: The Elite Scout-Snipers in One of WWII's Bloodiest Battles by Joseph Tachovsky with Cynthia Kraack is available June 2, 2020, in hardcover (338 pp, \$29.99, 978-1684510481) from Regnery Publishing, www.regnery.com.

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40 Thieves on Saipan

By Joseph Tachovsky

One of the 40 Thieves, Marvin Strombo, Returned “Good Luck” Flag to Japanese Soldier’s Family



AP Photo/Don Ryan

When one of the 40 Thieves, Marvin Strombo, was on Saipan, he took a “Good Luck” flag off a dead Japanese soldier.

He’s no different from me, Strombo thought. Standing up to leave, he noticed the captain’s Good Luck Flag peeking out of his uniform. Knowing the flag to be sacred to the Japanese, he decided against taking it, then reconsidered. Kneeling at the dead captain’s side he said, “If I don’t take it, somebody else will.” He removed the flag and tucked it into his dungarees. “I promise I’ll give it back to your family someday.” After unclipping the samurai sword from the officer’s belt, he raced off to rejoin the rest. (*40 Thieves on Saipan*, p. 237)

In 2017, Strombo made good on his promise and returned it to the captain’s relatives.



AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko

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40 Thieves on Saipan

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EXCERPTS

Super Marines Wanted – pages 47–8

SOLICITING VOLUNTEERS FOR THE SCOUT AND SNIPER PLATOON

Purpose: This unit will be specially trained in scouting and patrolling behind enemy lines to obtain information concerning strength, disposition, and intentions of enemy forces; to disrupt enemy communications; to destroy enemy personnel. Men selected will advance one rank.

Requirements: You must be certified as an expert marksman and have combat experience.

Skills to be learned:

- Demolitions: use of dynamite, TNT, and primer cord.
- Map reading: using a compass and field glass to draw maps; sketching maps from memory. Estimating enemy strength. How to search terrain for enemy activity.
- Camouflage: silent surveillance, spider traps, silent communication, to move across various kinds of terrain without being detected.
- Silent Killing: Judo, jujitsu, the Biddle method of knife fighting.
- Patience: You will learn patience and control when assigned a mission of annihilating any enemy hindering our advance. Submit your Record Book to First Lt. Tachovsky and Sgt. Knuppel, Scout-Sniper Platoon

Pact: We Won't Leave Our Wounded Alive—pages 75–6

Along with documentaries concerning the Imperial Army's sadism, veterans of Guadalcanal had observed the barbarity and savagery of their bitter enemy firsthand. Nothing sickened a Marine more than seeing the mutilated bodies of dead Marines: heads, hands, and feet cut off.... In some instances, it was apparent that the mutilation had begun before death—to inflict greater...suffering.

The war in the Pacific had no rules. It was no holds barred.

The men talked often about what it would be like working deep within enemy territory. At any time, any one of them could be captured. The concept of “no man left behind” did not apply to the Scout-Snipers. If a man was wounded to the point where he couldn't make it back on his own, trying to take him back might endanger the mission and the rest of the squad. They were told in no uncertain terms that if a man couldn't make it back on his own, he was to be left. That was something they accepted as part of the bargain.

One night after a day's work, the men talked about what they should do if the wounded couldn't take care of themselves and make it back. Mullins spoke last. “I don't want to be left alive to be taken prisoner. I don't want any of you taken prisoner. That'd be worse than bein' dead.”

Ski made a suggestion for the platoon to vote on. **Around the circle of resigned faces, forty voices agreed they wouldn't leave the wounded alive. That's how they thought it should be.**

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40 Thieves on Saipan

By Joseph Tachovsky

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR

1. Tell us about *40 Thieves on Saipan*. Who were the 40 Thieves and how did you discover their story?
2. Your father, Lieutenant Tachovsky, was the commanding officer of the 40 Thieves—how did they earn their nickname?
3. How did your dad select these Marines to serve in this elite platoon?
4. How did your dad earn his Silver Star?
5. The 40 Thieves were known for their daredevil nature and resourcefulness. Tell us some stories of their exploits
 - a. The time Lieutenant Tachovsky charged a Japanese bonzai attack
 - b. The improvised Molotov cocktails and what they were used to destroy
 - c. How and why they made bombs out of buckets filled with rusty shrapnel
6. Marvin Strombo is one of the last living 40 Thieves—why did he make national headlines back in 2017?
7. You didn't know anything about your dad's heroics as commanding officer of the 40 Thieves. What was it like for you to discover all of this? Why do you think he did not share any of his experiences of WWII?

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40 Thieves on Saipan

By Joseph Tachovsky

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Joseph Tachovsky



Joseph's father, Lt. Frank Tachovsky, receiving the Silver Star from Admiral Nimitz

JOSEPH TACHOVSKY is the son of Lieutenant Frank Tachovsky, commanding officer of the 40 Thieves. Tachovsky knew nothing of his father's heroic past beyond that he was a Marine in the Pacific until his father's funeral in 2011. A eulogy was given in which a man recounted a story wherein Lieutenant Tachovsky "saved every man in our unit" from a Japanese tank. This set him on a journey to discover everything he could about his father and the 40 Thieves. Tachovsky is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and currently resides in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin.



Cynthia Kraack

CYNTHIA KRAACK's literary skill breathed life into the stories and experiences of the 40 Thieves. She holds a B.A. in journalism and history from Marquette University, a master's degree from the University of Minnesota, and an M.F.A from the University of Southern Maine. Kraack is the author of five novels, including the award-winning *The High Cost of Flowers*. She resides in Mendota Heights, Minnesota.

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