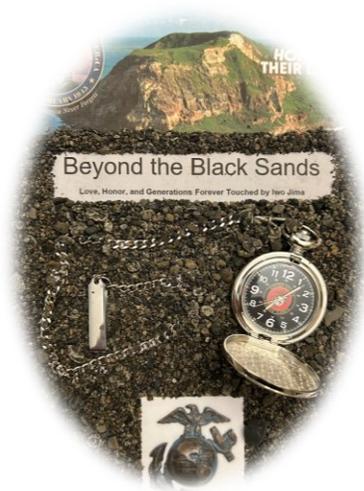


**HONORING  
THEIR LEGACIES**

# Beyond the Black Sands

Love, Honor, and Generations Forever Touched by Iwo Jima





*At first glance, it is a simple photograph. A pocket watch rests on the black sand of Iwo Jima, the Marine Corps emblem etched proudly on its cover. Yet within that still image lives a thousand untold stories of time, memory, and the unbreakable bond between those who served and those who remember them.*

*The pocket watch, worn smooth with age, speaks of moments that once passed in fear and in hope. It reminds us that time can wound, but it can also heal. It carries the quiet truth that while years move on, love and memory remain steadfast. To some, it may symbolize the steady ticking of life after war. To others, it may whisper of those whose time stopped too soon, their final hours forever joined to that island of black sand.*

*That sand, dark and coarse beneath the watch, is not merely earth. It is sacred ground. It holds the blood of young men who fought for each other more than for themselves. For thirty-six days it was their world, a place of fire, pain, and courage beyond measure. Even now, it seems to hold their presence, as if the island itself remembers the weight of their sacrifice.*

*The eagle, globe, and anchor is more than a symbol of the Marine Corps. It represents the family those men formed in battle, a family built not by birth but by shared struggle and unspoken trust. When the war ended, some of those brothers went home to embrace their loved ones again. Others found their rest on that same black sand, their spirits forever tied to the brothers who carried on.*

*And in the seal of the Iwo Jima Association of America, that brotherhood lives on. It gathers not only the veterans who survived, but the families who now carry their torch. Sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, grandchildren and friends, all find meaning in the legacy handed down to them. They keep alive the voices of those who once fought, bled, and died on that island, ensuring that their love, their courage, and their sacrifice will never fade into silence.*

**GySgt. Alfredo Cooke (Ret)**

## **A Note from the Author**

*Beyond the Black Sands* is a commemorative 81st Anniversary collection of stories, memories, and personal accounts surrounding the veterans of Iwo Jima and those whose lives they touched - families, friends, and loved ones. The contents draw primarily from first-hand recollections, interviews, letters, and oral histories shared by the veterans themselves or those closest to them.

Every effort has been made to preserve the authenticity and voice of the individuals represented, including their language, tone, and recollection of events. Where details, photographs, or historical context have been added, these are based on open-source materials, archival records, or other verifiable documentation to provide accuracy and clarity.

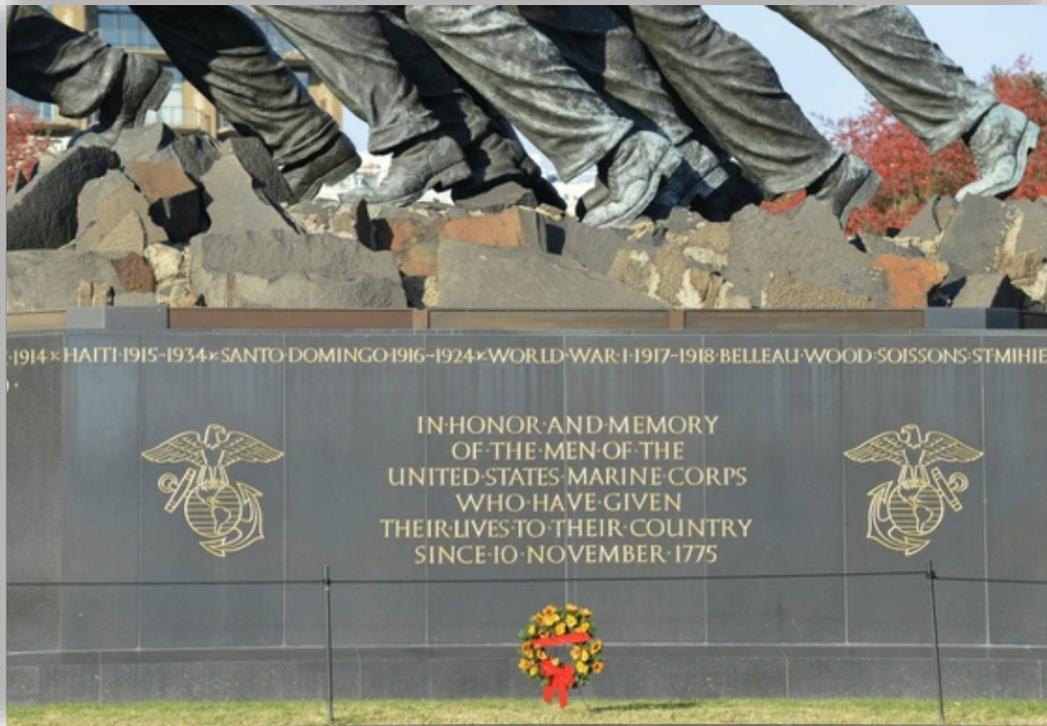
This work is not intended as a definitive military history, but rather as a heartfelt tribute to the men who served and to the generations who have carried their stories forward. Any errors of memory or interpretation are unintentional, and readers are encouraged to view this compilation in the spirit in which it was created - with respect, gratitude, and remembrance.

***GySgt. Alfredo Cooke (Ret)***



## IWO JIMA ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

"Among the Americans serving on Iwo Island, uncommon valor was a common virtue".... Fleet Admiral Chester William Nimitz



# 81 YEARS

**FEBRUARY 2026**

*The Battle of Iwo Jima took place from February 19 to March 26, 1945. The 36-day American invasion and capture of the Japanese island was one of the bloodiest engagements of World War II, with the island officially declared secured on March 26, 1945.*

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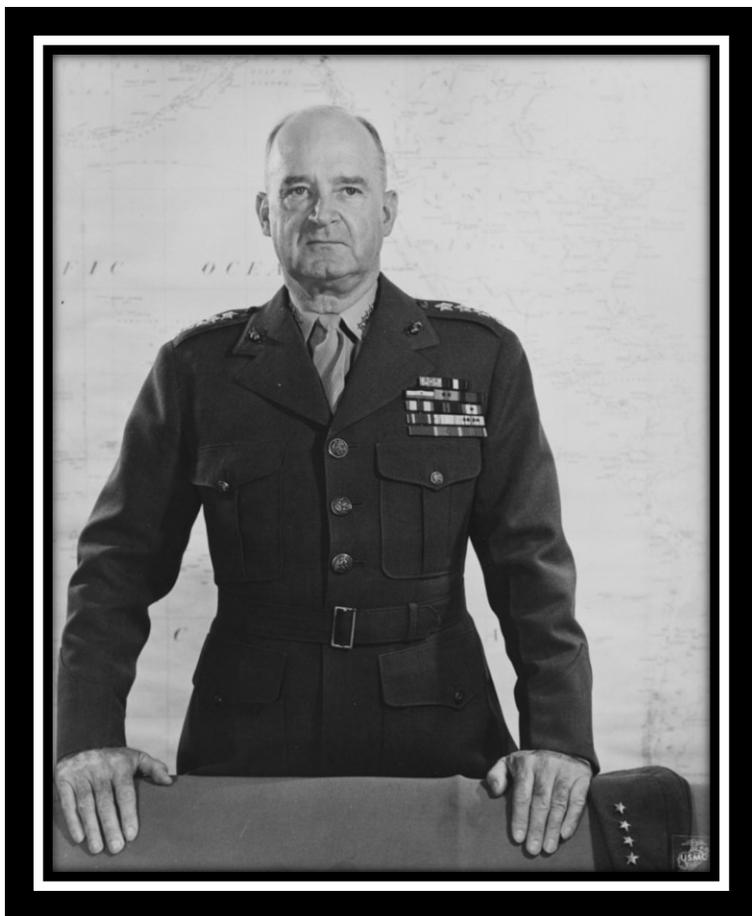
## ***Stephanie Vandegrift***

*Presenting her Father LtCol Alexander Archer Vandegrift Jr.*

*&*

*Grandfather General Alexander A. Vandegrift*





***General Alexander A. Vandegrift***

**18th Commandant of the Marine Corps  
1 January 1944 - 1 January 1948**



Alexander Archer Vandegrift was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, on 13 March 1887. In January 1909, after two years at the University of Virginia, he entered the United States Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant. He saw very active service in the Caribbean and Central America between 1912 and 1923, taking part in the capture of Coyotepe, Nicaragua, in the former year, the occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1914 and pacification efforts in Haiti beginning in 1915.

Major Vandegrift commanded a Marine battalion while stationed at Quantico, Virginia, from 1923 and in 1926 became Assistant Chief of Staff at the Marine Corps Base, San Diego, California. Service in China in 1927-28 was followed by duty in Washington, D.C., and at Quantico. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1934, returned to China in 1935 and reached the rank of Colonel in 1936. While stationed at Marine Corps Headquarters in 1937-41, Vandegrift worked closely with the Corps' Commandant and was promoted to Brigadier General in March 1940. He became Assistant Commander of the newly formed First Marine Division in late 1941 and the Division's Commanding General in early 1942.

Major General Vandegrift took his division to the south Pacific in May 1942 and led it in the long, harsh but successful campaign to seize and hold Guadalcanal between August and December 1942. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his "tenacity, courage and resourcefulness" during this operation. In November 1943, as a Lieutenant General, Vandegrift commanded the First Marine Amphibious Corps during the initial stages of the Bougainville campaign.

Returning to the United States in late 1943, he became Commandant of the Marine Corps on 1 January 1944. He guided the Service's continued expansion through the rest of World War II, oversaw its contraction following the conflict, and successfully defended its existence during the difficult post-war years. Promoted to four-star General effective in March 1945, Vandegrift was the first Marine Corps officer to hold that rank while on active duty. General Alexander A. Vandegrift completed his tour as Commandant at the beginning of 1948 and formally retired in April 1949. He died on 8 May 1973.

### **Historical Background on Defending the United States Marine Corps**

After World War II, there was intense debate in Washington about military unification, the idea of merging the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps under a single Department of Defense. Many senior Army and Navy officers (and some in Congress) questioned whether the Marine Corps should even exist as a separate force.

President Truman and Secretary of Defense James Forrestal were reorganizing the military under the new National Security Act of 1947. As this law reshaped the armed services, several wartime leaders, including Vandegrift, rotated out to make way for a peacetime command structure. His successor, General Clifton B. Cates, was chosen to lead the Corps into this new era.

In 1946, when he was defending the Marine Corps against proposals to merge it into a single unified military service General Vandegrift said publicly "The bended knee is not a tradition of our Corps. If the Marine Corps ever goes down, we will go down fighting and it will be in battle, not through any bureaucratic action in Washington."

This line captured the spirit of the Marines and became legendary inside the Corps. It was Vandegrift's response to proposals that would have stripped the Marine Corps of its independent role and folded it under the Army's control as merely an amphibious branch.

He went on to argue that "The Marine Corps has carved out its place in the nation's defense structure through sacrifice and success on the battlefield. It should not be destroyed on the conference tables of peacetime."

These statements infuriated some senior Army leaders and policymakers who supported unification, but they galvanized Congress and the American public behind the Marine Corps. His courage in that hearing is widely credited with saving the Marine Corps as an independent service.

The Commandant's tour was four years, and Vandegrift served almost exactly that. He was also nearing the mandatory retirement age (60). His end of tour as Commandant was consistent with both law and custom.





***LtCol Alexander Archer Vandegrift Jr.***



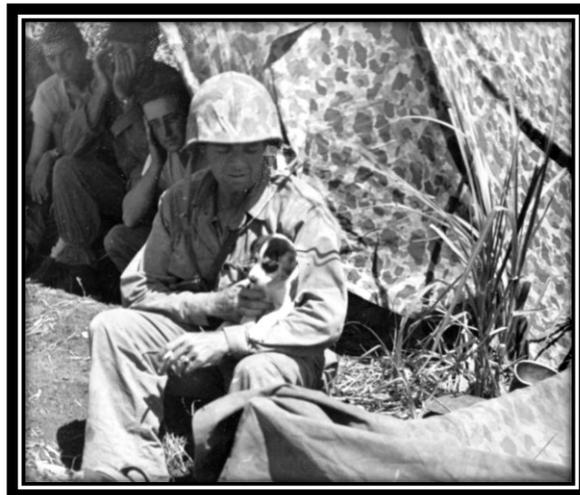
Colonel Alexander Archer Vandegrift Jr. was born on May 27, 1911. He was commissioned into the United States Marine Corps and rose through the ranks during the Second World War. By early 1945 he was a lieutenant colonel commanding the Third Battalion, 24th Marines, of the Fourth Marine Division during the invasion of Iwo Jima.

During the first days of the battle in February 1945, his battalion advanced under intense Japanese artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire. When the attack stalled and casualties mounted, he moved forward to the front lines to direct the fight in person. He reorganized scattered elements, encouraged his Marines, and led them in renewing the assault. When the enemy fire cut off part of his line, he brought up his reserve company to close the gap and reestablish the position. His personal leadership under fire steadied his battalion and enabled it to continue advancing against heavy resistance. He was wounded during these actions and later evacuated from the island.

For his actions on Iwo Jima, he received the Silver Star for gallantry in combat. The citation records his courage, determination, and devotion to duty under fire. He had earlier been awarded the Legion of Merit for his service from June to August 1944 during operations in the Central Pacific area.

After recovering from his wounds, Vandegrift continued his Marine Corps career, attaining the rank of colonel. He served with distinction through the remainder of his service years. His record stands as that of a disciplined and capable combat leader whose conduct on Iwo Jima reflected the highest standards of the Marine Corps.

Vandegrift Jr had a wife Nancy and four daughters, he passed away at the age of 58 on November 20, 1969, and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery - Section 2, Grant Drive Site 4872 - 5.



**...with a puppy after a skirmish with the enemy on Saipan - June 1944**



***Electronic Technician's Mate 2nd Class  
Arthur Lewis, USN***



I was nineteen years old when I went to Iwo Jima. I served in the Navy aboard LSM 238, a small landing ship that carried a Marine Regimental Combat Team of about forty men from the Fourth Division. We combat loaded in Hawaii and practiced landing on the beach at Maui before heading out across the Pacific at six knots. We didn't know exactly where we were going, only that it would be somewhere important.

After about thirty days at sea, tensions were running high. Our armored bulldozer up front by the bow doors kept breaking down, and every man aboard knew how much we would need it when the time came. When we neared Saipan, our skipper told the Marine captain he wanted the dozer removed at the next port. The Marine captain, calm but firm, rested his hand on his sidearm and told the skipper, "We're going to need that bulldozer when we hit the beach." I never forgot that moment. You had to love that Marine captain.

By the time we reached Iwo Jima, the bulldozer was running again, thanks to our Navy motor macks and the Marine who drove it. We poured gasoline into it until it roared to life. Then came the landing. It was chaos on that black sand beach, a frenzy of noise, smoke, and shouted orders.

I was nineteen, had never owned a car, and didn't even have a driver's license. Suddenly, in the middle of the unloading, a Marine yelled, "Get that weapons carrier out of here!" I looked around, saw no one moving, and realized I was the closest to it. So I climbed in, put my foot on the clutch, found a gear—any gear—and bumped it out of the way. That was the first time I ever drove anything. My wife, Barbara, always laughs when I tell that story and says, "He still drives like that."

In the days that followed, our ship was ordered to pick up a few of the very few prisoners taken on the island. We also took aboard some wounded Marines. Some of them didn't want to board the same ship as the prisoners, but they eventually did. None of the support ships would take the prisoners from us, so we cruised for a while with both the Marines and the prisoners aboard as bad weather rolled in. What happened next, when it began to rain, turned into quite a story of its own.

The weather had turned wet and drizzly. Our ship was cruising the area, waiting for further orders about what to do with the prisoners and the wounded but still walking Marines. This was probably during the second week after the initial landing.

By then, we were down to eating K rations, which was still better than what the Marines ashore had to eat. As the weather worsened and the air grew colder, the ship's cook prepared a large pot of soup. It had no label, so no one really knew what was in it, but it was hot and welcome. One by one, members of the crew and the Marines who were able came down to the well deck. They bent down to spoon feed the prisoners, many of whom were missing an arm or a leg. Their wounds were clean and neatly dressed. The look of gratitude in their eyes showed how deeply they appreciated the care being given to them by the same Marines they had so recently tried to kill.

That moment - shifting from hostility toward the enemy to compassion for them - said a great deal about the character of our Marines and Sailors. When the enemy was helpless and aware that they were now in the hands of men who had every reason to hate them, compassion replaced anger. One Marine helped a wounded Japanese prisoner light a cigarette that had

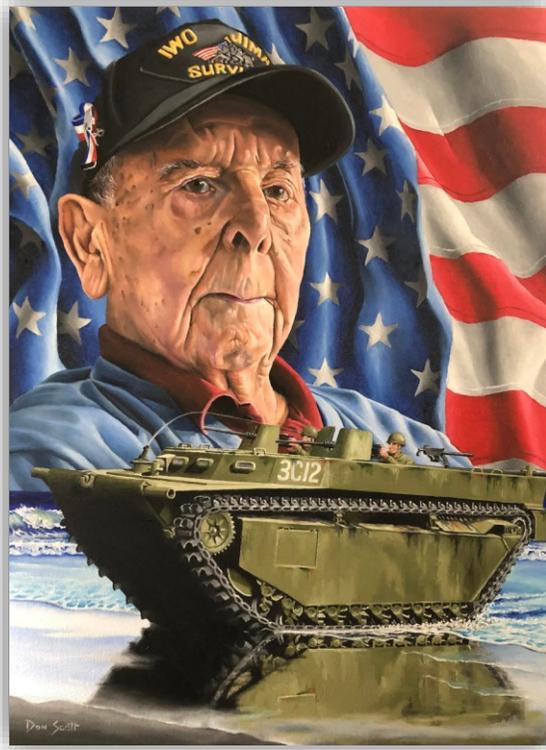
been given to him during his medical treatment. Soon after, another Marine came down and did the same for another wounded man who, not long before, had been the enemy.

I survived Iwo Jima without injury, though many did not. Looking back now at one hundred years old, I understand that even a nineteen-year-old sailor contributed something to that victory.

**Arthur Lewis, ETM Second Class, US Navy**







***Sergeant Joe Caminiti, USMC***



The next island the U.S. needed to take was Iwo Jima. It is a four-mile by two-mile island in the South Pacific, 750 miles from the coast of Japan. The Japanese had constructed two airfields and were working on a third. Their planes used these airfields to attack Saipan and harass American bombers returning from missions to bomb Japan. The Americans needed the island as a staging area for fighter jets to escort American bombers on their missions to mainland Japan.

On Iwo Jima, the Japanese military was well entrenched in blockhouses, pillboxes, and other gun emplacements hidden in the mountainside, along with a network of underground tunnels that enabled them to take cover from American bombardment. Despite heavy aerial and naval bombardment for sixty-six days, the U.S. was unable to take control of the island. Only after heavy fighting for thirty-six days were they able to secure it.

The Marines cleared the vast tunnel network and the numerous caves one by one. The fighting was up close and fierce, with heavy casualties on both sides. At the end of the fourth day of fighting, the U.S. Marines captured Mount Suribachi and raised the American flag, which was forever immortalized by Joe Rosenthal, an Associated Press photographer.

Joe recalls the landing at Iwo Jima. "I was in the tenth wave landing the 5th Marine Division. I was part of the 3rd Amphibious Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. The 5th had no amphibious tractors, so we were assigned to the 5th for the landing. There were 482 tractors that made the landing."

The tractors had to leave the troops at the waterline because the beach was very congested. Joe's tractor took on water and was very difficult to steer. They headed back from the beach toward the LSTs, and with little maneuverability they ended up on the wrong LST. They were ordered to return to the beach of Iwo Jima immediately and transport 75mm mortars to the men on the beach. "We were the only ones who went back a second time."

Joe's tractor stalled on the beach, but Joe removed the carburetor, put it back on, and it started. Some seventy-five years later, he would tell Rear Admiral Todd, the Chaplain for the U.S. Marine Corps, how he witnessed chaplains - many without weapons and helmets - going around doing their duty among the dead and dying as snipers shot at them.

Just as they arrived back at the LST, they ran out of gas on its ramp. The ramp operators tilted the ramp up and Joe's tractor rolled in. Being late, he stayed aboard the ship that night. At first light, Joe and his tractor shuttled men and supplies to the island and wounded back that second day.

Many of the tractors ran out of fuel and spent the first night on the ocean. The next morning, smaller ships towed them back to the ships to be refueled. The second night, Joe and his crew spent the night aboard ship. That would be the last time until the end of the battle, some thirty-four days later.

The next morning, they went ashore and remained. Every night from midnight till four a.m. they helped man the lines between Mount Suribachi and the airfield on the side of Mount Suribachi.

The island was made of volcanic ash. “Nothing would move on it... until they put steel mesh down to build the roads.” Joe recalled the Navy battleships offshore constantly shelling Japanese positions dug deep into the mountain. “Anybody tells you that they don’t get scared is full of bologna. The Japs had a big mortar... and it would sound like a freight train.”

On Iwo Jima, the men were assigned various duty details such as picking up the dead, delivering ammunition, unloading incoming tractors, and transporting the wounded. Many trips Joe’s tractor did not bring the wounded to the rear. Those Joe felt were in real bad shape, he and his crew took directly to the medical ships. If the ship was unable to handle the wounded, he took them to another one that could. He saved a number of lives by doing this. Many times he came under fire when retrieving the dead and wounded. The only problem was that the tractor was lightly armored, and some of the bullets could go right through the walls.

“I’m pretty sure it was the third day, and we were on the airstrip, and we saw the flag go up on Mount Suribachi. We never thought it was going to be a historical thing. The first time you couldn’t really see it. They called for a bigger flag. I saw the bigger flag go up. We had a clear look at it. We looked right at it, and I said, ‘It’s about time!’”

“On Iwo Jima, we had to go on the line at night and watch and see if they came across the line. In the morning we came back down to the beach. One kid jumped off the tractor and landed right on one of those mines, and bang, he was gone. At that time you’re only a kid, eighteen years old. You’re just hoping it’s not you. You really can’t explain it unless you were there.”

Joe recalled spending time on Iwo Jima from February 19 through March 25. There was fighting the entire time he was on the island. When orders came down to leave, they were told to leave all of their equipment on the island and return to Maui, Hawaii, where they would draw new equipment.

Joe remained in Hawaii for three months. There they received all new equipment for the planned invasion of Japan. However, before they could deploy, the Japanese surrendered, and the war was finally over. Joe returned to the States on a battleship and made port in San Diego. He took a train to Maryland and then another train to Hartford. Joe was discharged with the rank of Sergeant.

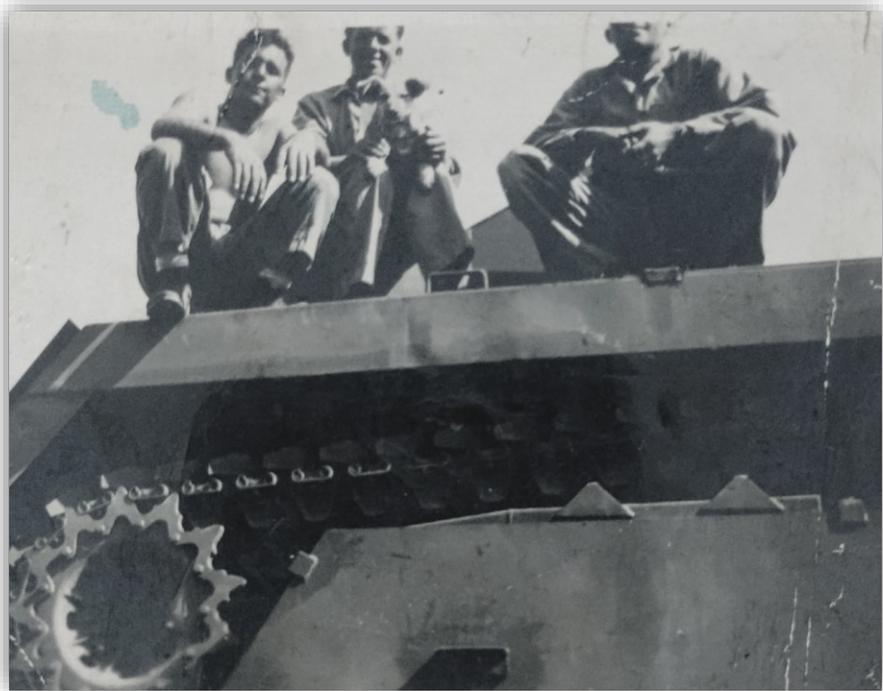




*Joe is on the left... the single stripe (PFC)*



**This is a picture of his unit on Guam just before they shipped out for Iwo Jima. Joe is the shortest marine in the front row.**



**Joe is on his tractor at his tractor sitting on the end**



**Joe's base on Guam where they trained for Iwo Jima after defeating the Japanese on Guam. The base is called Mills. It is no longer there. The Governor of Guam searched for it for us when we were there but no record of it.**



**Joe is the guy without the shirt, in this group, all from his tractor**



**Joe on Iwo To, 2025**



**Joe cutting his 100 Year Birthday cake**



**Joe with the Admiral on Guam, 2025**



**Joe with Marine Commander on Guam, 2025**



**Preparing for Wreath Laying on Iwo To, 2025**



**Iwo Jima Survivors who were on Iwo To in 2025**

# November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

On November 10, 2025, veterans from around the area arrived at South Side School in Bristol, Connecticut. At 9:30 a.m., the students of South Side School presented a program to honor veterans. The event was held the day before Veterans Day since there is no school on that day.

The students read pieces they had written and sang the songs of all the branches of service. They even formed an arch of American flags for the veterans to walk through.

Joe Caminiti, an Iwo Jima survivor, was one of the veterans who took part in the program. With the help of the former mayor - one of his final acts on his last day in office - Joe made a special presentation.

In March, Joe had traveled to Iwo To, Japan, at the request of the United States Marine Corps and the Iwo Jima Association of America, to take part in a ceremony offering an olive branch of peace to the Japanese people. Joe placed one of three wreaths on behalf of the United States at the "Reunion of Honor" monument, which had been donated by the son of John Wayne. He did this alongside the Prime Minister of Japan.

While there, United Airlines presented Joe with four boxes to collect and display sand from the island. Joe was the only Iwo Jima survivor present who was able to walk onto and along the beach. He gathered sand and filled a glass vial in each box before returning home with them.

On November 10, Joe presented one of the boxes, with the help of American Legion Post 2, to South Side School. He also provided a document showing that he had attended South Side School many years ago, where he maintained a perfect attendance record. Joe was returning to his old school at the age of 101.

The students of South Side School presented American Legion Post 2 with a check from a fundraiser they had organized for veterans. After the program, Joe traveled to the State Capitol to take part in the celebration of the 250th Marine Corps Birthday. He was the oldest Marine present that day.





## ***Carl Berghofer***

***Presenting his Grandfather Sergeant Carl Bernard Berghofer, USMC***





***Sergeant Carl Bernard Berghofer, USMC***



**Born May 19, 1926, and passed September 20, 2025 at the age of 99**

Carl had many titles to include husband, father, grandfather, friend, community leader, story teller, hero, life saver, and teacher. He is preceded by his wife Faith, his brother Lewis and sister Dee. Also passing before him; three children Faith Elaine, Gordon, and Carl "Windy" Jr. He is survived by his daughter-in-law Janice and 6 grandchildren, and 8 great-grandchildren.

Carl was born in and grew up around Carson NM and Taos Junction. While in Carson he attended school up to the 8th grade. At 17 he joined the US Marines where he was wounded on Iwo Jima. After his discharge he returned home. His love of outdoors and wild life lead him to a career in the New Mexico Game and Fish. During his time as game and fish warden, he was instrumental in developing the state's hunter safety education program. During this time, he also was actively involved in various lodges, notably Bent Lodge #42 in Taos, NM.

After retirement he joined forces with a paramedic OR Mascaranes and started an ambulance service to help the community get the help they needed. Later this rescue squad became part of the Dixon VFD. He did all this while continuing to grow and provide fresh fruit to the local community and beyond.

Everything he did with his life was to help the community and preserve a way of life. When you read in a history book about the greatest generation, the Great Depression, WW2 , landing on the moon and everything up to 21 September 2025. Carl Berghofer was there to see it. He was a living history book, always willing to tell the stories about life. He will be missed, a legacy never forgotten.

**Carl Berghofer went through hell for  
you, your family, and your friends....**

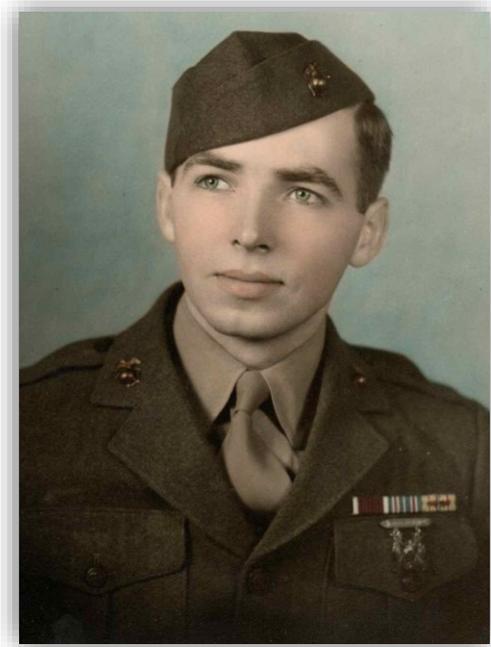
**NEVER forget the price that has been  
paid in bloodshed and sacrifice for  
YOUR comfortable existence.**



***Jim Swanson***

*Presenting his Father Corporal Bill Swanson, USMC*





***Corporal Bill Swanson, USMC***



William Kenneth (Bill) Swanson enlisted in the United States Marine Corps on September 17, 1942, a few weeks after his eighteenth birthday. He attended and graduated from recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California.

After graduation, Bill participated in advanced infantry training and amphibious landing exercises at Camp Pendleton, California. He was assigned as assistant Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) man in the 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division.

In January 1943, his regiment departed San Diego from the Broadway Pier aboard the USS *Mount Vernon* (AP-22), bound for further training in New Zealand.

In June 1943, the 9th Marines sailed to Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, for final training. Between training periods, the Marines were assigned to various working parties. One night, while unloading fuel barrels below deck, the ship they were on was torpedoed by a Japanese aircraft and had to be evacuated. Aside from routine enemy bombing raids, this marked Bill's first exposure to combat conditions.

On November 1, 1943, Bill was in the first wave of Marines to land at Empress Augusta Bay during the invasion of Bougainville, British Solomon Islands. While on Bougainville, his squad participated in multiple patrols and skirmishes and held the right flank during the assault on Hand Grenade Hill, part of the larger Battle of Piva Forks.

During this campaign, Bill and his comrades suffered from malaria, tropical ulcers, rashes, fungal infections, dysentery, and other jungle-related ailments.

On Christmas Eve morning, the remnants of Bill's squad were ordered to accompany a patrol from Division Headquarters to locate a reported large Japanese encampment deeper in the jungle. The patrol discovered and infiltrated the encampment, estimated to contain over 1,000 enemy troops. As they prepared to withdraw, the patrol was detected, and a firefight broke out. Heavy rain began to fall, making visibility nearly impossible. During the confusion, Bill's squad realized the other squad had withdrawn. Miraculously, Bill's men were able to disengage, using the jungle and a nearby swamp to evade capture and return safely. A few days later, the 9th Marines were relieved and returned to Guadalcanal.

On July 21, 1944, the 9th Marines took part in the invasion of Guam. Once again, the fighting in the dense jungle was fierce and unrelenting. After the island was declared secure, the regiment remained on Guam conducting patrols and mop-up operations. During this period, Bill contracted dengue fever, and later that fall suffered a relapse that developed into yellow jaundice. He was hospitalized and nearly died, but eventually recovered and rejoined his platoon.

On February 19, 1945, during the invasion of Iwo Jima, the 9th Marines were held in floating reserve offshore. By this time, Bill had been promoted to corporal and assigned as assistant squad leader in charge of the flamethrower group.

From their ship, Bill and his comrades witnessed the raising of the flag on Mount Suribachi. They hoped it meant the battle was over and their assistance would no longer be needed, but it was not to be. They landed ashore shortly afterward.

The 9th Marines were ordered to seize Airfield No. 2 near the center of the island as rapidly as possible. Bill's battalion advanced along the slope leading up to the airstrip and was ordered to fix bayonets and charge across the runway. Hundreds of Marines rose and ran forward into withering machine-gun, mortar, and anti-tank fire, as well as low-angled fire from anti-aircraft guns. It was a hellish landscape with no cover, yet they continued to advance.

As the battalion reached the far end of the airfield, they paused to regroup under heavy fire. During this action, Bill was struck by shrapnel in his right hand, partially severing his thumb and index finger. A corpsman bandaged his wounds and marked him for evacuation, but Bill refused to leave his squad. "Our feelings for each other and for the damned Corps are probably beyond understanding," he would later say.

His lieutenant, seeing the condition of his hand, ordered him off the field, saying, "You get the hell out of here. We don't need any cripples where we're going." For the first time in 27 months, 2nd Platoon went one way, and Bill went the other—regardless of their bond and devotion to each other and the Corps.

Bill survived the war, later marrying Rita Dolores Rockefeller. Together, they devoted their lives to their home and family. After retirement, they joined the 3rd Marine Division Association, renewing old friendships and forming many new ones.

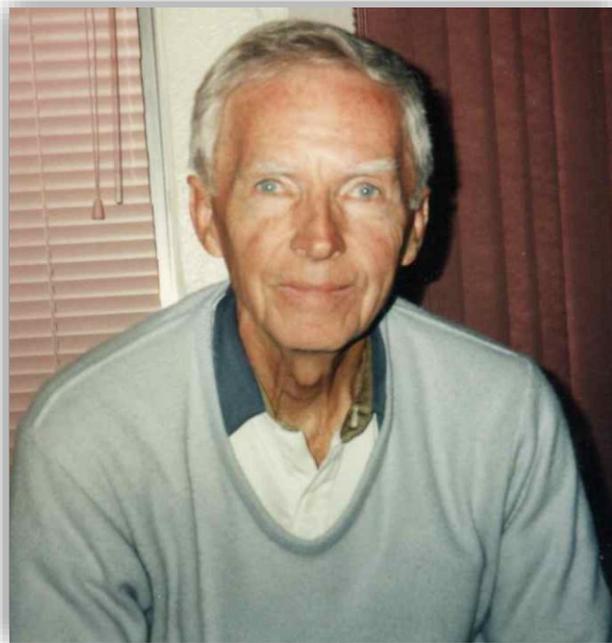
In retirement, Bill wrote a memoir titled *The View from My Foxhole*, describing his wartime experiences. Originally intended as a family keepsake, the manuscript eventually reached a publisher in late 2021 when Bill was 97 years old. The publisher was impressed and released the book in November 2022. Several reviewers compared it favorably to *Helmet for My Pillow* and *With the Old Breed*.

Bill often said that memories of Iwo Jima's horrors stayed with him nearly every day of his life. In his later years, he read that the Japanese commander's goal was to delay the Marines as long as possible to protect Japan and his own family, while the Marines' mission was to capture Iwo Jima as quickly as possible through relentless attack. Bill reflected, "In many ways, we were both successful."

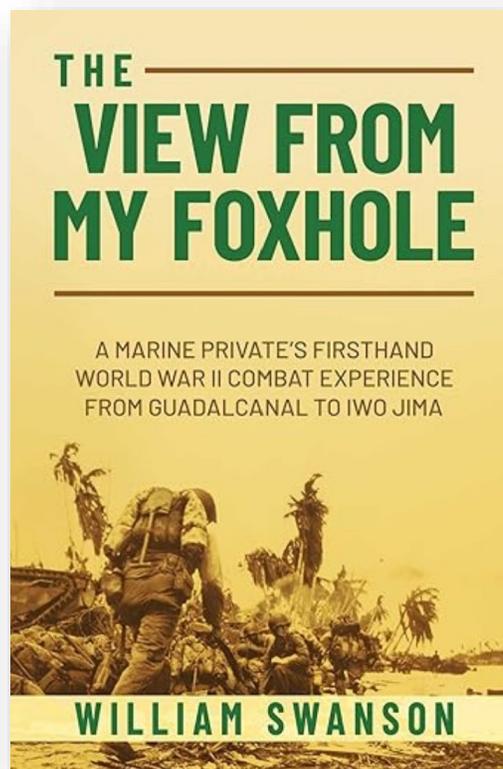
Bill and Rita's remains are inurned at Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California.



*"I've had a great life and I'm ready to go."*



**Asst. Squad Leader 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, C Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 9th Marines, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division**





August 25, 2025

Dear Mr. Swanson,

Thank you for thoughtfully sharing your father's memoir, *A View from My Foxhole*, written after his service as a rifleman during World War II. Preserving the story of his 27 months and three campaigns in the Pacific as a gift to your family—and later making it available more broadly—reflects the enduring spirit of our Corps.

*A View from My Foxhole* has been officially added to the Commandant's Library as entry number 1136. Please accept our gratitude for honoring his service and ensuring that his voice, and the legacy of his generation, remain part of our Marine Corps story.

Semper Fidelis,

Eric M. Smith  
General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Mr. Jim Swanson  
1441 East Ln  
Imperial Beach, CA 91932

August 25, 2025



THE SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS

25 Aug 2025

Mr. Swanson

A quick note to say thank you! I am in receipt of your father's book. Your father and I share the same answer to "Why the Marines?" "... probably had to do with their unique esprit de corps." We remain a special Tribe today because of what your father and his peers did 80 plus years ago.

I look forward to reading the rest of the book and in my travels share some of the stories with Marines serving today. Marines get to live forever.

I hope to shake your hand one day. Thank you again.

Semper Fidelis

"Everyone fights"



## ***Gail Chatfield***

***Presenting her Father Sergeant John Manning Methvin***





***Sergeant John Manning Methvin, USMC***



John Manning Methvin enlisted in the United States Marine Corps on September 17, 1940. He served with Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division.

During his service in World War II he fought in three major engagements in the Asiatic-Pacific Theater. He was present at Bougainville on November 1, 1943; at Guam, Mariana Islands, on July 22, 1944; and at Iwo Jima beginning February 19, 1945.

His rank at the time of the memorial listing is Sergeant, U.S. Marine Corps. According to his memorial plaque at the Mt. Soledad National Veterans Memorial he was awarded the Combat Action medal, the Good Conduct medal, the American Defense medal with one star, the American Campaign medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign medal with three stars, the Philippine Liberation medal, and the World War II Victory medal.

John's enlistment came at a moment when the Corps was expanding and preparing for a global war. By the time the 9th Marines were committed to the Central and South Pacific campaigns, he was a noncommissioned officer in Headquarters Company. In that role he was a leader not of a single rifle squad alone but of the battalion's backbone. Headquarters Company carried many responsibilities. It provided command and control support, maintained communications, managed administration and supply for the battalion, and furnished specialist teams that kept the fighting units functioning under fire. As a Sergeant he would have been responsible for making sure those systems worked under the worst conditions, training and directing younger Marines, and closing the gap between officers and enlisted men when orders had to become action.

On Bougainville he and his fellow Marines confronted jungle terrain, hidden enemy positions, and the constant strain of patrolling and hard patrolling. The island campaigns demanded endurance and an ability to improvise. Headquarters Company was often the hinge on which operations turned, moving message runners, setting up radio links, organizing resupply, and seeing that wounded and stores were evacuated or replaced. The daily tasks were mundane until they were not. A single radio message, a properly staged truck, or a timely supply of ammunition might decide whether a platoon held or fell back.

On Guam the fighting took on a different shape but the stakes were the same. Open coral ridges, bunkers, and fierce counterattacks tested small unit cohesion. In the chaos of movement and assault, the competence of battalion headquarters mattered. A Sergeant like John kept records, helped organize movement of men and materiel, and steadied new replacements who had never yet seen combat. He would have known the names of the men in his charge and the face of exhaustion on those returning from patrol.

Iwo Jima was the crucible. The island's black volcanic ash offered little cover, and a web of tunnels and pillboxes made costly every yard. The 9th Marines were in the center of an operation where every company and every support element had to be synchronized. Headquarters Company had to keep command posts supplied, maintain communications lines that were under fire, and coordinate casualty evacuation and ammunition routes across a landscape cut by enemy fire. As a Sergeant, John Manning Methvin stood at the juncture of those demands. He relayed orders and reality. He ensured the battalion could still function when radio sets went down and when roads were cratered by shelling. He moved among the men, carrying messages, supervising wire teams, organizing litter teams for the wounded, and convincing terrified replacements to keep moving.

Those days carved memory into men. The roar of naval gunfire, the sudden silence after an attack, the pall of smoke and the stubborn light on Mount Suribachi were not abstract history. They were the hours and faces John lived through. Surviving Iwo meant witnessing losses that never fully leave a man. Back at command posts and aid stations, he saw friends carried away and watched discipline and compassion keep the battalion moving forward.

When the flames of battle cooled, Sergeant Methvin was part of a generation of Marines who returned to civilian life carrying medals, scars, and stories. He was one of the NCOs whose steady work behind the lines made front line action possible. His record as a Marine who enlisted before the war and then fought on Bougainville, Guam, and Iwo Jima places him among those who endured the slow attrition and sudden violence of the Pacific war and who kept the machine of war running at battalion level when it mattered most.

He is described as a beloved husband and father in the memorial record. The plaque is located on Wall F, Side 1, Row 1, Plaque Number 47 at Mt. Soledad.

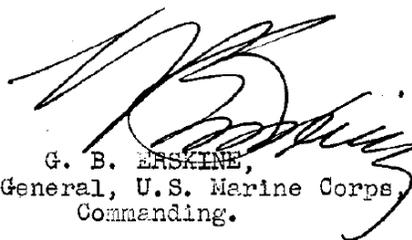


HEADQUARTERS  
3D MARINE DIVISION F.M.F.  
IN THE FIELD



*THE COMMANDING GENERAL, 3D MARINE DIVISION,  
FLEET MARINE FORCE, TAKES PLEASURE IN COMMENDING  
SERGEANT JOHN M. METHVIN  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE AS SET FORTH IN THE FOLLOWING  
CITATION:*

"For meritorious service in the performance of his duties while serving with a Marine infantry battalion from 23 July, 1942 to 23 April, 1945. During this period, Sergeant METHVIN participated in three major battles against Japanese forces: on BOUGAINVILLE, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS, from 1 November to 29 December, 1943; on GUAM, MARIANAS ISLANDS, from 21 July to 11 August, 1944, and on IWO JIMA, VOLCANO ISLANDS, from 24 February to 5 April, 1945. Sergeant METHVIN materially aided the successful operation of his unit by executing his duties as non-commissioned officer-in-charge of distribution of 81 mm mortar ammunition in a very efficient manner. Sergeant METHVIN'S devotion to duty and his exemplary conduct under adverse conditions were an inspiration to his comrades. His actions throughout were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

  
G. B. ERSKINE,  
Major General, U.S. Marine Corps,  
Commanding.

*DATED:* 29 August, 1945.



## **Keith Cupp**

***Presenting his Father WT2 Theodore Thomas Cupp, USN***





***WT2 Theodore Thomas Cupp, USN***



The aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CV-6) participated in the Iwo Jima invasion in February 1945, supporting Marines with carrier-based aircraft for close air support and combat air patrol. During the invasion, Enterprise and the carrier Saratoga (CV-3) flew continuous air support missions, including day and night patrols. While Enterprise was involved, it is important to note that two carriers were at Iwo Jima: Enterprise and the Saratoga.

A WT2 aboard the USS Enterprise (CV-6) during the Battle of Iwo Jima was a Water Tender Second Class - a petty officer, second class (equivalent to today's E-5) who worked in the engineering department, specifically in the boiler rooms.

Here's what that meant in practice:

- **“WT” (Water Tender):** A sailor responsible for maintaining and operating the ship's boilers, which produced the steam that powered the turbines driving the ship's propellers and provided energy for electrical and auxiliary systems.
- **“2” (Second Class):** The rank level - an experienced technician and often a supervisor of a watch section below decks.

During the Battle of Iwo Jima (February–March 1945), Enterprise provided air support for the invasion, launching strikes and combat air patrols. While the pilots and flight deck crew handled the visible action, Water Tender Second Class sailors like a WT2 were deep in the ship, standing watch over the roaring boilers, monitoring steam pressure, fuel feed, and water levels to keep the carrier moving and launching planes.

Their work was critical. A boiler failure could cripple the ship or even cause an explosion. The engineering crew worked in extreme heat, surrounded by noise, and often without seeing daylight for days.

So, a WT2 on the USS Enterprise at Iwo Jima was a skilled engine-room sailor, ensuring that the carrier could maintain speed, maneuver for flight operations, and continue supporting Marines on the island.

Theodore Thomas Cupp, 93 of Aumsville, Oregon passed away on Thursday August 2, 2018. Born in Gervais, Oregon on October 21, 1925, Ted left Salem High School (now called North Salem), to join the United States Navy to serve in World War II.

Ted served onboard the most decorated ship of World War II, the USS Enterprise CV-6 from 1943-1946, beginning at the Battle of Guadalcanal, and including Iwo Jima, and the Battle for Philippine Sea. **In June 2011, he was the first graduate of the class of 2011 from North Salem High School, graduating 67 years after his scheduled class.**

As a new Fireman on the Salem Fire Department, he met Ella Maxine Pybas in 1950 while responding to a chimney fire at the home she was babysitting in Salem, and on the spot invited her to the Annual Fireman's Ball Gala (**love at "First Fire"**). They were married in November 1950 at the Skamania County Court House in Southwest Washington.

Ted served for 35 years in the Salem Fire Department as a decorated member, followed by 25 years of service to the Aumsville Rural Fire Department. He was a member of the

International Association of Fire Fighters and was considered an expert in his field. In retrospect, his learning and participation in damage control and fighting fires on Enterprise in WWII provided a vision for his career - helping others in crisis and peril. He never lost that desire. Ted was tragically struck and killed on August 2, 2018 crossing a two lane road in front of the family farm in rural Oregon...going to check on a neighbor who benefited from he and his wife Maxine's caring touch. A life well lived and somewhat ironic: He survived many battles in WWII and yet, his life ended on a quiet road on a rural highway in the peaceful Willamette Valley outside of Salem, 15 miles from where he was born and raised. He's now with Jimmy.

Ted had a passion for hard work, farming, Navy history, baseball, fishing, feeding treats to canine friends, and befriending anyone who would listen; and most of all, his beloved family of Maxine, sons Dennis Michael "Mike" of Salem (US Air Force service), Gary Don of Aumsville (Fire Fighter service), and Keith Brian of Vancouver, Washington (US Navy service, onboard the USS Enterprise CVN-65).

Ted and Maxine have 19 grandchildren, a growing number of great grandchildren, and so many friends, if counted, would show that his life, was "well lived" by selfless service to others.





**Mementos from both dad (Ted Cupp) and my friend Rick's father (Zoeller), a Marine at Red Beach One.**



**"Band of Brothers" in lobby at Guam**



***Bruce Hammond***

*Presenting his Father Sergeant Ivan Hammond, USMC*





***Sergeant Ivan Hammond, USMC***



Ivan Hammond, was born on a 40 acre farm in Bayou Jacques, Louisiana, on Aug. 12, 1925. On October 26, 1943, he fulfilled a lifelong dream of enlisting in the Marine Corps. He served for the duration and six months, until May 16, 1946. He was at the Battle of Iwo Jima, and the post-war Occupation of Japan.

Ivan said he appreciated his no nonsense straightforward training in boot camp. After boot camp, they took part in various maneuvers and mock assaults, on the western US coast and in Hawaii. In some drills, Marines had to assume the duties of their superiors, after mock casualties.

On Dec. 2, 1945, in Hilo, HI, Ivan and his group boarded APA 197 U.S.S. Lubbock. Two days later, his Lt., Carlton Johnson told him, "Oh, BTW, you are now a sergeant." He was 19. Ivan, a radio operator, was put in charge of ALP #13 (Air Liaison Party, attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn-28<sup>th</sup> Regiment), which was part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company. 5<sup>th</sup> JASCO had 10 communication companies and 13 Naval gunfire teams (shore fire control), Divisional, Regimental, and Battalion. The ALP's called in close air support and gunfire from naval gunfire teams. They sailed to Eniwetok, Saipan, and Tinian, en route to Iwo Jima. Hardly anyone knew the name of the island they were going to.

They arrived at Iwo Jima on Feb. 18. Ivan said there were ships everywhere as far as you could see. Ivan says, "At 4:30 am Feb 19th, we got in a Higgins boat with our radio Jeep and trailer (the trailer was too long to hook up in advance). Only 10 men were in our boat. Our 3<sup>rd</sup> BN-28<sup>th</sup> was in reserve. They told us, "You are not going in today. You will go in tomorrow." H hour was at 9:00 am. But by 10:30, there were so many casualties, our 3<sup>rd</sup> BN 28<sup>th</sup> was ordered in. The battle was only 1 1/2 hours old, and we were already going in. We landed on Green Beach at 12:29. There was so much boat and gear wreckage on the beach, the Coxwain kept moving down the beach until he found a clear spot to land.

They moved their jeep up the ramp to hook up the trailer. Driver Bill Trompeter got the front wheels off the ramp, and they pancaked in the sand. He drove far enough to get the rear wheels off the ramp, and they stuck, too, with the trailer locked onto the jeep, stuck on the boat ramp. Ivan stood on the trailer, trying to pull out the antenna bag. Japanese mortar fire was bracketing the Higgins boat, so the Lt. JG told the Coxwain to ram the trailer forward. The boat jackknifed the trailer and Ivan into the jeep, squashing his hip canteens. The canteens prevented serious injury. He sat in the water, stunned, before telling himself he needed to get moving.

Ivan grabbed the antenna bag, and a chocolate bar off the front seat of the Jeep. It would be his only food for the next 24 hours. His group had their top packs on the trailer filled with \$125 of good chow and pineapples. Making it to the second terrace at 1:00 pm, they looked back. There was no trailer in sight. Instead of eating good, all their goodies went up in smoke.

There was enfilading machine gun fire (two directions) just above the ground at the second terrace, Ivan's Lt. told them to wait till the fire lifted. Around 15:30, someone took out the machine gun on the right. About 16:00, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn-28<sup>th</sup> BAR man grew exasperated from lying in the sand. He stood up, shouldered his BAR, and blasted the other machine gun nest.

The machine gun fire was over, and we started walking 700 yards towards the other side of the island. Just after we set up our radio in a Jap Tank Trap, we saw mortar fire from atop Suribachi come our way. They bracketed us on each side. Protocol called for bagging our equipment before moving- NO WAY! We grabbed our five pieces and ran. The next day, we met

our Lt, who said, "You made a good move yesterday." When we asked him how big the hole was, he said, "About as big as a jeep."

PFC John F. Huffhines, 13<sup>th</sup> Marines, attached to the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment, was instrumental in setting up the communications wire from the forward G Battery Observer to the Battery CP. Thanks to John, Glamour Gal was the first 105mm howitzer to fire on Mt. Suribachi. Huffhines later received a personal letter of appreciation from his lieutenant. Wiremen received a special commendation in one of the action reports. John, may he RIP, is a former FMDA president.

On D+1, Ivan called in a 5-plane strike on a machine gun nest between our 3rd BN-28<sup>th</sup> and Suribachi. One photo of this exact air strike sits in the national archives, titled "artillery position"- but it was a machine gun nest. The photograph shows "tail end Charlie," the last plane in the 5-plane formation. Wiping out the Jap position allowed the 3rd BN-28<sup>th</sup> to make 100 yards. And yards did not come cheap on Iwo Jima; some considered twenty yards a day the norm. Some days, they lost yards.

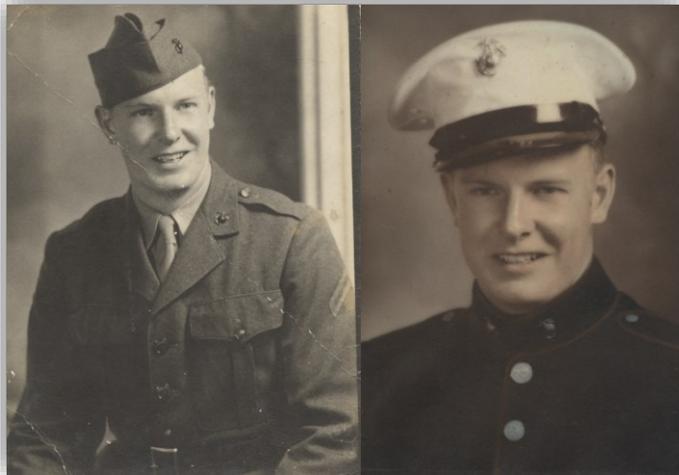
On D+2, there was a 40-plane strike on Suribachi's cinder cone. Contemporary accounts call it a strike without calling it napalm. That is partly because napalm tech was considered top secret for many years. It proved instrumental in taking Suribachi. Every one of these napalms detonated, which was unusual, and all but one hit the target. That one hit the rim of the cone, and detonated, rolling downhill towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn-28<sup>th</sup>, burning all the way. It extinguished itself before it reached them.

It is underappreciated how deeply the crater napalm explosions permeated the mountain's underground tunnel system, both consuming oxygen and producing much carbon monoxide. Immediately after this strike, Japanese activity was noticeably slower during the day. Col. Harry Liversedge said, "We'll wait one more day (D+3), and we'll go up after that." It was on D+4, that we raised the US flag on Suribachi.

There were many casualty hot spots on Iwo Jima. One of the worst was Bloody Gorge. Ivan called Bloody Gorge surreal. The gorge measured only seven hundred yards in length, and between two hundred and five hundred yards in width, yet it took the exhausted Marines nine days of brutal combat in the worst terrain on the island to clear out the labyrinth of subterranean defenses there. The terrain was so convoluted that it prevented close air support. Eleven days after Adm. Nimitz declared the island clear, Bloody Gorge finally came to a close, costing around 5,000 additional casualties.

One thing Ivan found remarkable was the number of young men who fought on Iwo Jima, and how well they carried out their missions. Some Marines were 16 and younger, who lied about their age to enlist. One of these was a Medal of Honor recipient, Jaclyn Lucas.

A BAR man took out a machine gun nest above the second terrace. PFC Charles Waterhouse, an injured demolition man, witnessed this event, painting it from memory years later, in a painting called The BAR Man. Fifth Marine Division Association commissioned "The BAR on the Beach" memorial statue, based on the painting. The Iwo Jima Association of America helped dedicate the memorial to all the Marines of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Divisions, and all the services who fought at Iwo Jima. It is installed on the Semper Fi Trail, near the chapel, behind the Marine Museum at Quantico, Virginia.



**Left to Right: Sgt. Ivan Hammond, PFC Rino Bertoncello, CPL Bob Wonderly,  
Seated, PVT Bill Trompeter**



***David Beard***

***Presenting his Father Yeoman 2nd Class Delmar Beard, USN***





***Yeoman 2nd Class Delmar Beard, USN***



In early 1945 the tank landing ship USS LST 715 was assigned to the Asiatic Pacific theater and was one of many vessels attached to Task Force 51 for the amphibious operation to seize Iwo Jima. The ship had been commissioned in August 1944, and by February she was prepared to carry troops, vehicles, ammunition, and fuel toward the volcanic island.

On board was Yeoman Second Class Delmar Beard, a young sailor whose typing ability placed him in a clerical post but whose service quickly brought him into the heart of the invasion. He later recalled that his ship was one of the first to arrive on Iwo Jima's Green Beach, close to Mount Suribachi.

At dawn on February 19, 1945, the invasion began. LST 715 moved toward the shore, maneuvering into position to unload its cargo of bulldozers, trucks, gasoline, and heavy ammunition onto the black volcanic sand. Beard recorded messages, logged supplies, and handled communications, but he also joined the unloading parties. He remembered how the soft ash made movement almost impossible and said, "They just had volcanic ash; you could not even drive a jeep on it."

Beard and his shipmates worked under constant threat. Ammunition boxes were carried off the ramp while enemy rifle, mortars, and artillery fire rained down. "There was a lot going on, but you could not let it get to you," Beard said. He described how a marine handing him ammunition was struck by gunfire and how he himself narrowly escaped being hit while unloading on the beach.

Meanwhile, USS LST 715 remained grounded near the beachhead, unloading vehicles and fuel that kept the Marines supplied as they pushed inland. The ship's position near Mount Suribachi placed her directly within the assault sector of the landings.

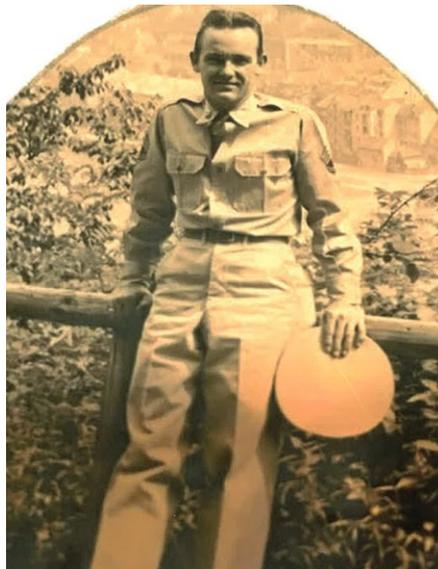
Through February and March, unloading continued even as the fighting raged. Beard witnessed scenes of terror and courage as the Marines attacked fortified Japanese tunnels dug into the slopes of Suribachi. "You would see Japanese on fire coming out of the tunnels and rolling in the ash trying to put the fire out," he said.

When the island was finally secured, LST 715 continued to support occupation and supply duties in the Pacific. For Delmar Beard, the experience of Iwo Jima remained one of the most intense and unforgettable moments of his wartime service.

In summary, Delmar's great service to the United States was that he enlisted in the Navy out of high school in 1944. He served in the Navy during WWII and was in the Naval Reserve after the war. In September 1948 he enlisted in the Army and served 22 years, retiring in 1970.



**At Zipps, his favorite Restaurant/Sports Bar. We meet there every Friday after work for wings and a margarita.**



**In Heidelberg Germany in his Army uniform.  
He was 24-25 years old - SFC (E7)**



**On Iwo Jima, March, 2025 for the 80th Anniversary of the Invasion of Iwo Jima**



**Joe Lauck**

*Presenting his Father 2nd Lieutenant Jack Lauck, USMC*





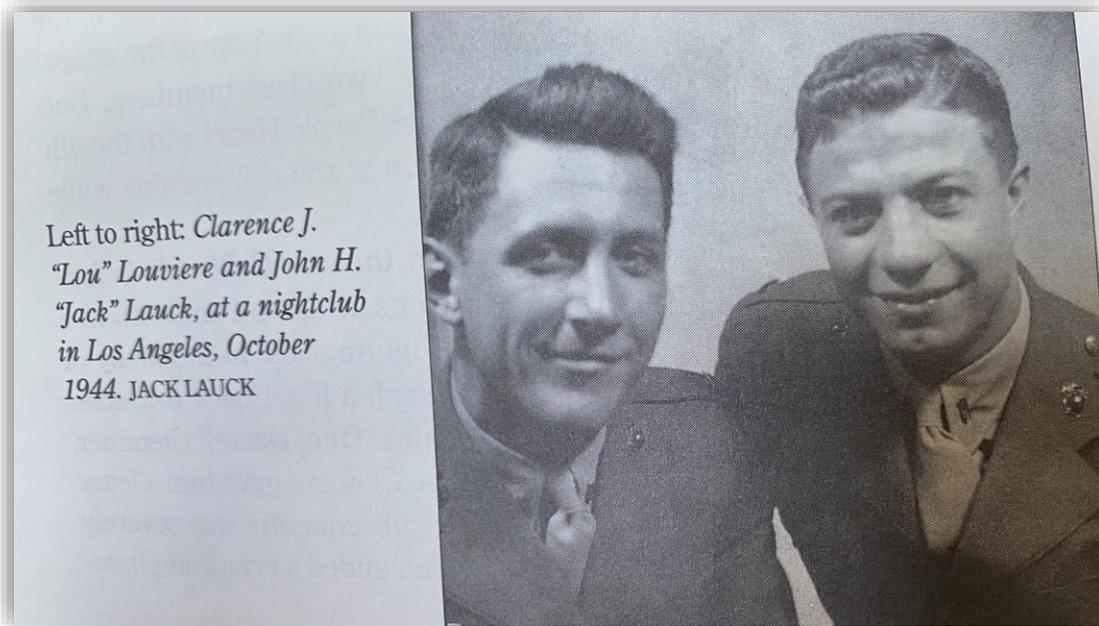
***2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Jack Lauck, USMC***



Colonel John "Jack" H. Lauck, USMC (Ret.), 84, of Indianapolis, lost a final quiet battle and passed away on Thursday, March 29, 2007. He was born in Indianapolis on March 3, 1923.

A graduate of Cathedral High School, Jack completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the University of Notre Dame and received both his Master's degree in Business Administration and Doctorate degree from George Washington University.

Jack served proudly in the United States Marine Corps for twenty-six years. He left the University of Notre Dame prematurely through the Navy's V-12 program, which was designed to accelerate the number of junior officers serving in the Pacific Theater. Graduating with the celebrated Special Officer Candidate School class in September 1944, Jack entered the Second World War with his fellow Marines in the newly formed Fifth Marine Division, landing within an hour of the invasion of Iwo Jima and subsequently surviving all thirty-six days there.





#### **Enroute to Iwo Jima on troop transport USS Highlands with an unknown friend**

My late father, Jack Lauck, left Notre Dame early to enter the Navy's V-12 program and became a freshly minted Second Lieutenant with the 5th Division's 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines. He endured all thirty-six days of battle on Iwo Jima. After World War II, he remained in Japan as part of the occupation forces until March 1946, where he wounded his hand while blowing up Japanese aircraft, an injury he managed to hide from his mother when he sent pictures home.

In 1948, he married my mother. When Korea broke out before MacArthur had even left his headquarters in occupied Tokyo, my father was recalled from the reserves and went back to war from December 1951 until September 1952 as a Captain. During that time, he earned another pair of Purple Hearts, bringing his total to four, and a Bronze Star with Combat V for his efforts. I have priceless letters from him to my young mother during Korea, politely inviting her to consider making the Marine Corps a permanent career. He did just that, serving until 1969 and retiring as a full Colonel.

I could never get him to return to Iwo after they began the Reunion of Honor in 1995. He died in 2007 with the eagle, globe, and anchor on his tombstone and a portion of the Marines' Hymn on his Mass card. I attended last year's Arlington event in February and traveled to Guam and Iwo in March, and I have thought of it literally every day since.



Surviving officers returning from Iwo Jima aboard USS Storm King



My father AFTER surviving the battle, back at Camp Tarawa, enjoying a newspaper and a cigar. It is the only photo I have of him with a 5th Division patch.

Jack's service in World War II continued with the occupation of Japan, and he was later recalled to serve in the Korean War. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Commendation Medal, both with Combat V, four Purple Hearts, a Meritorious Service Medal, a Presidential Unit Citation, and a Navy Unit Citation, among others, for his heroic and brave service. Jack's early Marine Corps experience with the SOCS was featured in the book *We Few* by James R. Dickenson.

After retiring from the military as a Colonel, he taught business policy and other courses at Brown University, George Washington University, and for the final sixteen years of his academic career at Ball State University. Upon retirement as a professor, he researched and wrote the book *Katyn Killings: In the Record*, a historic look at the fifteen thousand Polish prisoners of war during World War II. He also lectured on the topic and served as the longtime editor of the SOCS Newsletter.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Anthony P. and Marie E. (Habig) Lauck; his three brothers, Father Anthony Lauck, Leo, and Frank; and a sister, Marie T. Lauck.

He is survived by his loving wife of fifty-six years, Mary Ann (Bush) Lauck; seven children, Carole (Lauck) Clark (John W.), John A. (Lura), James G. (Kathy), Joseph M. (Julie), Paul M. (Carol S.) Lauck, Mary Gerard (Lauck) Barr (Don), and Anne (Lauck) Mills (Joe IV); nine grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. He is also survived by his sister, Agnes Lauck Darko.

Jack was an active member and leader of the Service Club of Indianapolis, the Notre Dame Club of Indianapolis, and the Fifth Marine Division Association. He was also a member of St. Matthew Catholic Church.

He will be remembered as a gracious and dedicated husband, father, grandfather, and friend, with a grand sense of humor and storytelling. He shared his values of education, American freedom, and religious faith with all who knew him.

**Andrea Lauck-Gibson** wrote on Nov 13, 2012:

*"I take comfort in knowing that my grandfather, Happy Jack, is now my guardian angel. I hope that my own little military family will make him proud every day. Thank you for your perfect example...Thank you for everything...Thinking of you always, and "May we all meet in heaven"ANDREA"*

**Dale N. Davis** wrote on Nov 13, 2012:

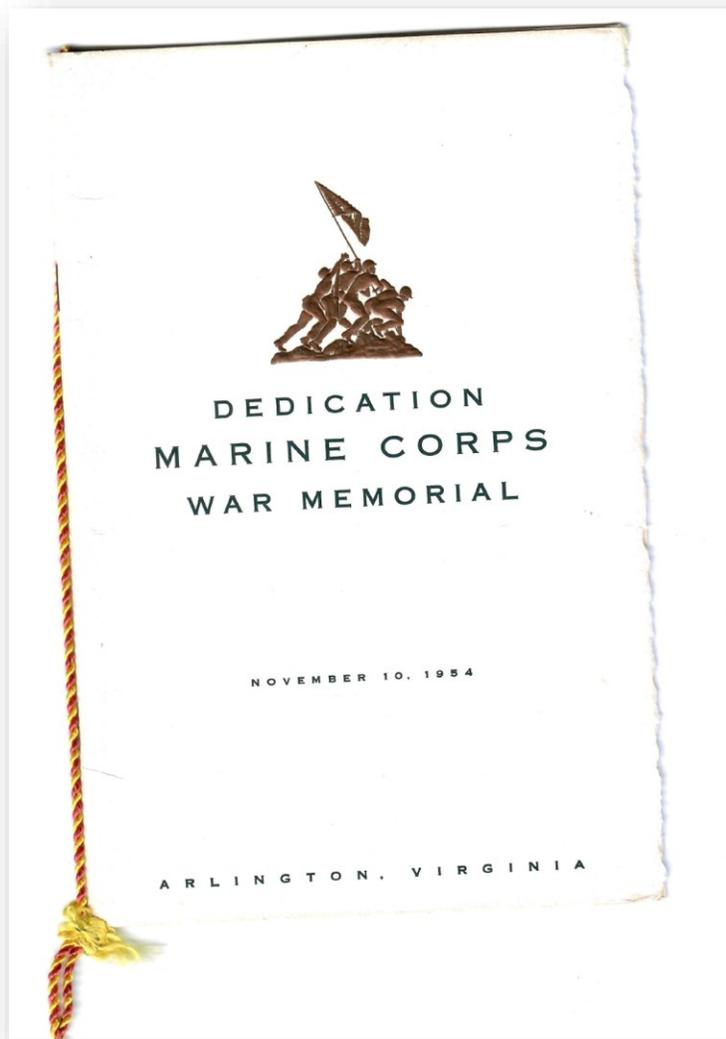
*"Jack Lauck was the personification of the military leader that I learned as a young Cpl in 1948. He accomplished the mission, he took care of his men, and he was not afraid to bend the rules when necessary to get it done. I have always counted myself fortunate to have served with him twice. He was my company commander in Korea and he was my boss when I taught at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. My world is the poorer for his passing. Semper Fi, Colonel, Dale"*

**Rick Hermann** wrote on Nov 13, 2012:

*"I had the privilege of having two classes with Dr. Lauck, 1972 and 1973. He was the best teacher that I had at Ball State. May he rest in the peace of Christ."*

**Kenneth Lewis** wrote on Nov 13, 2012:

*"I read the obituary in the 3/31/07 Indy Star. Mr. Lauck epitomized the phrase "warrior scholar" and reading about his life made me proud to be an American and a USMC vet. How a Jr. Marine officer could survive 36 days on Iwo Jima is truly epic. I wish I could have met this fabulous man from the "greatest generation." Semper Fi Col. Lauck when you get to heaven you will be in good company. God bless you and God bless America. Ken Lewis USMC 1982 "*









***Diane Basilone Hawkins***  
*Presenting her Uncle Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone*





***Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, USMC***



John Basilone (04 November 1916 to 19 February 1945) was a United States Marine Corps gunnery sergeant who received the Medal of Honor for heroism above and beyond the call of duty during the Battle for Henderson Field in the Guadalcanal campaign, and the Navy Cross posthumously for extraordinary heroism during the Battle of Iwo Jima. He was the only enlisted Marine to receive both of these decorations in World War II.

He enlisted in the Marine Corps on 03 June 1940, after serving three years in the United States Army with duty in the Philippines. He was deployed to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and in August 1942, he took part in the invasion of Guadalcanal. In October, he and the two machine gun sections under his command held off an attack by a far numerically superior Japanese force. He was one of only three Marines in that group to survive.

In February 1945, he was killed in action on the first day of the invasion of Iwo Jima, after he single-handedly destroyed an enemy blockhouse and led a Marine tank under fire safely through a minefield. He has received many honors, including having base streets, military facilities, and two United States Navy destroyers named for him.

### **Early Life and Education**

Basilone was born in his Italian American parents' home on 04 November 1916, in Buffalo, New York. He was the sixth of ten children. His five older siblings were born in Raritan, New Jersey, before the family moved to Buffalo where John was born; they returned to Raritan in 1918. His father, Salvatore Basilone, emigrated from Colle Sannita, in the province of Benevento, Italy and settled in Raritan. Basilone's mother, Theadora Bencivenga, was born in 1889 and grew up in Manville, New Jersey, but her parents, Carlo and Catrina, also came from Benevento. Basilone's parents met at a church gathering and married three years later.

Basilone grew up in the nearby Raritan Town (now Borough of Raritan) where he attended St. Bernard Parochial School. After completing middle school at age 15, he dropped out prior to attending high school. Basilone worked as a golf caddy for the local country club before joining the military.

### **Military Service**

#### **US Army**

Basilone enlisted in the United States Army in July 1934 and completed his three-year enlistment with service in the Philippines, where he was a champion boxer. In the Army, Basilone was initially assigned to the 16th Infantry at Fort Jay, New York, before being discharged for a day, reenlisting, and being assigned to the 31st Infantry.

After he was released from active duty, Basilone returned home and worked as a truck driver in Reisterstown, Maryland. After driving trucks for a few years, he wanted to go back to Manila and believed he could get there faster by serving in the Marine Corps rather than in the Army.

## US Marine Corps

He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1940, in Baltimore, Maryland. He went to recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, followed by training at Marine Corps Base Quantico and New River. The Marines sent him to Guantánamo Bay for his next assignment and then to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands as a member of "D" Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division.

## Guadalcanal

On 24 October 1942, during the Battle for Henderson Field, his unit came under attack by a regiment of about 3,000 soldiers from the Japanese Sendai Division using machine guns, grenades, and mortars against the American heavy machine guns. Basilone commanded two sections of machine guns which fought for the next two days until only Basilone and two other Marines were left standing. As the battle went on, ammunition became critically low. Despite their supply lines having been cut off by enemies who had infiltrated into the rear, Basilone fought through hostile ground to resupply his heavy machine gunners with urgently needed supplies. Basilone moved an extra gun into position and maintained continual fire against the incoming Japanese forces. He then repaired and manned another machine gun, holding the defensive line until relief arrived.

When the last of the ammunition ran out shortly before dawn on the second day, Basilone, using his pistol and a machete, held off the Japanese soldiers attacking his position. By the end of the engagement, Japanese forces opposite the Marines' lines had been virtually annihilated. For his actions during the battle, Basilone received the United States military's highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor. Afterwards, Private First Class Nash W. Phillips of Fayetteville, North Carolina, recalled from the battle for Guadalcanal:

***"Basilone had a machine gun on the go for three days and nights without sleep, rest, or food. He was in a good emplacement, and causing the Japanese lots of trouble, not only firing his machine gun, but also using his pistol."***



**On Guadalcanal, the machine gun position that Basilone fired from on the night of the battle. The site is seldom visited as it requires a tour guide and an hour walk through the jungle to get there. It is the original foxhole used by Basilone is still there. Aiming posts that once held barbed wire are still in the ground.**

**Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone's Medal of Honor Citation reads:**

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the  
MEDAL OF HONOR to

SERGEANT  
JOHN BASILONE  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

*For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action against enemy Japanese forces, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division in the Lunga Area, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, on 24 and 25 October 1942. While the enemy was hammering at the Marines' defensive positions, Sgt. BASILONE, in charge of 2 sections of heavy machine guns, fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault. In a fierce frontal attack with the Japanese blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, one of Sgt. BASILONE'S sections, with its gun crews, was put out of action, leaving only 2 men able to carry on. Moving an extra gun into position, he placed it in action, then, under continual fire, repaired another and personally manned it, gallantly holding his line until replacements arrived. A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sgt. BASILONE, at great risk of his life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valor and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.*

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Presented at Balcombe, Australia,  
by Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift on May 21, 1943

**War Bond Tours**

In 1943, Basilone returned to the United States and participated in war bond tours. His arrival was highly publicized, and his hometown held a parade in his honor when he returned. The homecoming parade occurred on Sunday 19 September and drew a huge crowd with thousands of people, including politicians, celebrities, and the national press. The parade made national news in Life magazine and Fox Movietone News. After the parade, Basilone toured the country raising money for the war effort and achieved celebrity status.

Although he appreciated the admiration, he felt out of place and requested to return to the operating forces fighting the war. The Marine Corps denied his request and told him he was needed more on the home front. He was offered a commission, which he turned down, and was later offered an assignment as an instructor, but refused this as well. When he requested again to return to the war, the request was approved. He left for Camp Pendleton, California, for training on 27 December. On 03 July 1944, he reenlisted in the Marine Corps.

## **Marriage**

While stationed at Camp Pendleton, Basilone met his future wife, Lena Mae Riggi, who was a sergeant in the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. They were married at St. Mary's Star of the Sea Church in Oceanside, California, on 10 July 1944, with a reception at the Carlsbad Hotel. They honeymooned at an onion farm near Portland, Oregon.



**Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone and Lena Basilone  
on their wedding day, July 10, 1944,  
at St. Mary's Star of the Sea in Oceanside, California.  
(Photo courtesy of St. Mary's Star of the Sea)**

## **Iwo Jima and Death**

After his request to return to the fleet was approved, Basilone was assigned to "C" Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division. On 19 February 1945, the first day of the invasion of Iwo Jima, he was serving as a machine gun section leader on Red Beach II. While the Marines landed, the Japanese concentrated their fire at the incoming Marines from heavily fortified blockhouses staged throughout the island. With his unit pinned down, Basilone made his way around the side of the Japanese positions until he was directly on top of the blockhouse. He then attacked with grenades and demolitions, single-handedly destroying the entire strong point and its defending garrison.

He then fought his way toward Airfield Number 1 and aided a Marine tank that was trapped in an enemy mine field under intense mortar and artillery barrages. He guided the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite heavy weapons fire from the Japanese. As he moved along the edge of the airfield, he was killed by Japanese mortar

shrapnel. His actions helped Marines penetrate the Japanese defense and get off the landing beach during the critical early stages of the invasion. Basilone was posthumously awarded the Marine Corps' second-highest decoration for valor, the Navy Cross, for extraordinary heroism during the battle of Iwo Jima.

**John Basilone's Navy Cross citation reads as follows:**

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the NAVY CROSS posthumously to

GUNNERY SERGEANT  
JOHN BASILONE  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

*For extraordinary heroism while serving as a Leader of a Machine-Gun Section, Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, 19 February 1945. Shrewdly gauging the tactical situation shortly after landing when his company's advance was held up by the concentrated fire of a heavily fortified Japanese blockhouse, Gunnery Sergeant BASILONE boldly defied the smashing bombardment of heavy caliber fire to work his way around the flank and up to a position directly on top of the blockhouse and then, attacking with grenades and demolitions, single handedly destroyed the entire hostile strong point and its defending garrison. Consistently daring and aggressive as he fought his way over the battle-torn beach and up the sloping, gun-studded terraces toward Airfield Number 1, he repeatedly exposed himself to the blasting fury of exploding shells and later in the day coolly proceeded to the aid of a friendly tank which had been trapped in an enemy mine field under intense mortar and artillery barrages, skillfully guiding the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite the overwhelming volume of hostile fire. In the forefront of the assault at all times, he pushed forward with dauntless courage and iron determination until, moving upon the edge of the airfield, he fell, instantly killed by a bursting mortar shell. Stouthearted and indomitable, Gunnery Sergeant BASILONE, by his intrepid initiative, outstanding skill, and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of the fanatic opposition, contributed materially to the advance of his company during the early critical period of the assault, and his unwavering devotion to duty throughout the bitter conflict was an inspiration to his comrades and reflects the highest credit upon Gunnery Sergeant BASILONE and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.*

For the President,  
JAMES FORRESTAL  
Secretary of the Navy

## Burial

He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, in Arlington, Virginia. His widow, Lena M. Basilone, died on 11 June 1999, aged 86, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California. Lena's obituary notes that she never remarried and was buried still wearing her wedding ring.



## Awards and Decorations

Gunnery Sergeant Basilone's military awards include

- Medal of Honor
  - Navy Cross
  - Purple Heart Medal
- Navy Presidential Unit Citation with One Star
  - Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal
- American Defense Service Medal with One Star
  - American Campaign Medal
- Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with Two Stars
  - World War II Victory Medal
- United States Marine Corps Rifle Sharpshooter Badge

## Other Honors

Basilone received numerous honors, including the following:

### Marine Corps

- An entry point onto Camp Pendleton from U.S. Interstate 5 is called “Basilone Road”.
- A section of US Interstate 5 running through Camp Pendleton is called “Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone Memorial Highway”.
  - A parachute landing zone at Camp Pendleton is called “Basilone Drop Zone”.
- During the Crucible portion of Marine Corps Recruit Training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, there is an obstacle named “Basilone’s Challenge” that consists of carrying ammunition cans filled with concrete up a steep, wooded hill.

### Navy

- The United States Navy commissioned USS Basilone, a Gearing-class destroyer, in 1949.
  - The ship’s keel was laid down on 07 July 1945, in Orange, Texas, and launched on 21 December 1945.
    - His widow, Sergeant Lena Mae Basilone, sponsored the ship.
  - A plaque at the United States Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C.
  - The John Basilone (DDG-122) was laid down in January 2020.

### Public

- In 1944, Army Barracks from Washington state were moved to a site in front of Hansen Dam in Pacoima, California, and rebuilt as 1,500 apartments for returning soldiers.
  - This development was named the “Basilone Homes” and was used until about 1955.
    - The site is now a golf course.
- The memorial parade for Basilone along Somerset Street in his hometown of Raritan, New Jersey, has been held since 1981.
  - At Montclair State University, a residence hall is named after him.
  - At Bridgewater-Raritan High School, the football field is called “Basilone Field”.
    - On the wall of the fieldhouse next to the field is a mural honouring Basilone.
    - The annual Basilone Bowl, presented by the Somerset County Football Coaches Association and the US Marine Corps, is a football game played by select seniors from Somerset County, New Jersey and supported by select cheerleaders from Somerset County, New Jersey, played on Basilone Field, which began in 2012.
  - The Knights of Columbus Council #13264 in his hometown is named in his honor.
- An overpass at the Somerville Circle in Somerville, New Jersey, on US Highway 202 and 206 that goes under it, is named for Basilone.
  - The New Jersey Turnpike bridge across the Raritan River is named the “Basilone Bridge.”
- A connector road at the southwest of Newark Liberty International Airport, that connects to Earhart Drive, is named after Basilone.
- The John Basilone Veterans Memorial Bridge crosses the Raritan River, in Raritan, NJ, at First Avenue and Canal Street.

- In 1948, the John Basilone American Legion Post dedicated a memorial statue at the intersections of Old York Road and Canal Street in Raritan.
  - The statue, featuring Basilone holding a water-cooled Browning machine gun, was sculpted by Phillip Orlando, a childhood friend.
- A bust of Basilone is sited at Piazza Basilone, in Little Italy, San Diego, at Fir and India Streets.
  - The war memorial there is dedicated to residents of Little Italy who served in World War II and Korean War.
- The Order of the Sons of Italy in America Lodge #2442 in Bohemia, New York, is named in his honor.
- The Basilone Room in Raritan Public Library is where memorabilia about him is kept.
  - On 10 November 2005, the US Postal Service issued the “Distinguished Marines” stamps honoring four Marine Corps heroes, including Basilone.
    - In 2011, Basilone was inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame.

### In Popular Culture

- The film First to Fight (1967) features Chad Everett as “Shanghai Jack” Connell, a character based on “Manila John” Basilone.
- The 10-part HBO miniseries The Pacific (2010) is based on the intertwined stories of Basilone and two other Marines (Robert “Lucky” Leckie and Eugene “Sledgehammer” Sledge).
  - Actor Jon Seda stars as Basilone



**Basilone Memorial Field , Bridgewater NJ**



**Sgt. Lena Basilone christens USS Basilone, 21 December 1945**



**Colle Sannita is a small Italian town in the Province of Benevento, Italy. The relationship between Colle Sannita and John Basilone is that his family had roots there, and the town of Raritan, New Jersey, John Basilone's hometown in the US, established a sister city relationship with Colle Sannita in his honor.**



**Diane Basilone Hawkins at the USS John Basilone (DDG 122) COMMISSIONED  
in New York City on November 9th, 2024**





**Valerie Leman**

*Presenting her Father 2nd Lieutenant Craig Leman, USMCR*





***2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Craig Leman, USMCR***





**Service:** United States Marine Corps Reserve  
**Rank:** Second Lieutenant  
**Battalion:** 3d Battalion  
**Regiment:** 26th Marines  
**Division:** 5th Marine Division  
**Action Date:** March 8, 1945

**Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific: Serial 44533**

*The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Second Lieutenant Craig B. Leman (MCSN: 0-41941), United States Marine Corps Reserve, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as a Rifle Platoon Leader of Company H, Third Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines, FIFTH Marine Division, during action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, 8 March 1945. After the tremendous explosion of a Japanese position and intense small arms fire from the enemy had caused most of his platoon and the adjacent platoon to become casualties, Second Lieutenant Leman unhesitatingly exposed himself to the enemy fire to rally his men and, organizing all available troops in the area, succeeded in grouping the remnants of three platoons and pressed forward the attack. By his aggressive actions in renewing the attack, he prevented the Japanese from launching a counterattack against a very weak spot in the lines. Although wounded in the action, he refused evacuation until his units were dug in for the night and a new leader had arrived. His resolute spirit and courageous devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service.*

Craig B. Leman was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 12, 1923, to Dorothy Nussbaum, a piano teacher, and Edward Leman, a bank employee. The exposure to classical music he received as a child cemented it in his heart for the rest of his life, from volunteering to play the pump-organ at religious services on the boat ride to Iwo Jima to serving on the board for and crafting rich program notes for organizations like Chamber Music Corvallis.

After graduating from high school in 1940, Leman attended the University of Chicago and followed a pre-law track until his concern for his fellow Americans led him to enlist in an officer training program with the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (USMCR). Leman enlisted in June of 1942 and was called to active duty in July 1943 with a V-12 program located at Northwestern University. While at school, he swam, ran on the track team, wrestled, and felt guilty about not being on the front lines.

In December 1943, Leman headed to Parris Island for training, a unique experience due to the participants being both officer candidates and regular enlistees. He qualified as an expert rifleman, spent time as an Assistant Drill Instructor, and then traveled to Special Officer Candidate School in May 1944 at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. After the demanding training there, Leman traveled by train across the country to Camp Pendleton, California, for further preparation. He then went overseas to Hawaii, joined the 5th Marine Division, and traveled in convoy to Iwo Jima.

Leman's role at Iwo Jima was to land on Red Beach II at 11 A.M. on February 19, 1945, as part of the eleventh wave, and unload materiel - ammunition and rations - from the landing craft while under fire. Amidst the scared, seasick Marines regurgitating their breakfasts, Leman noticed their coxswain navigating them toward the wrong beach and had to threaten him with his .45 to correct the course. Things did not improve from there; Leman was surrounded by death and destruction from the time of his landing until he left the island.

A Marine working party is a temporary detail of men assigned to the hard, dangerous labor of loading and unloading LSTs on the beach. Usually, under a noncommissioned officer and working with the Navy beach and shore parties, they hauled ammunition, rations, fuel, and equipment from the ship's tank deck across the soft volcanic sand to supply dumps, and often backloaded casualties or damaged gear for evacuation. They worked under constant threat of artillery and mortar fire, struggling in heat, smoke, and deep ash to keep supplies moving. Though rarely mentioned, these Marines were vital to sustaining the assault, ensuring front-line units were never without food, water, or valuable ammunition.

The photo below was taken by a Coast Guard Photographer about D+2 (February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1945). Leman said he is the man facing left standing to the left of the man with the carbine strapped over his shoulder. Leman said they had formed their shore party (working party) squads in a chain to pass ammo from the landing craft to the supply dump ashore. He was supposed to stand guard, so when he saw the cameraman, he turned away.



On March 3, 1945, Leman went to the front lines with H Company, Third Battalion, 26th Marines, as leader of the first rifle platoon. This was a group of twenty-two men, down from an original forty-seven, who averaged twenty-one years of age - about the same age as Leman. They tried to move forward as ordered but were too few to assault fortifications they could not see that housed an unrelenting enemy.

For the next four days, the process of bombardment and attempted advance repeated until they attempted a surprise advance before a bombardment. As they moved forward toward a cave, there was a tremendous explosion that stunned Leman and killed the majority of his platoon and many others.

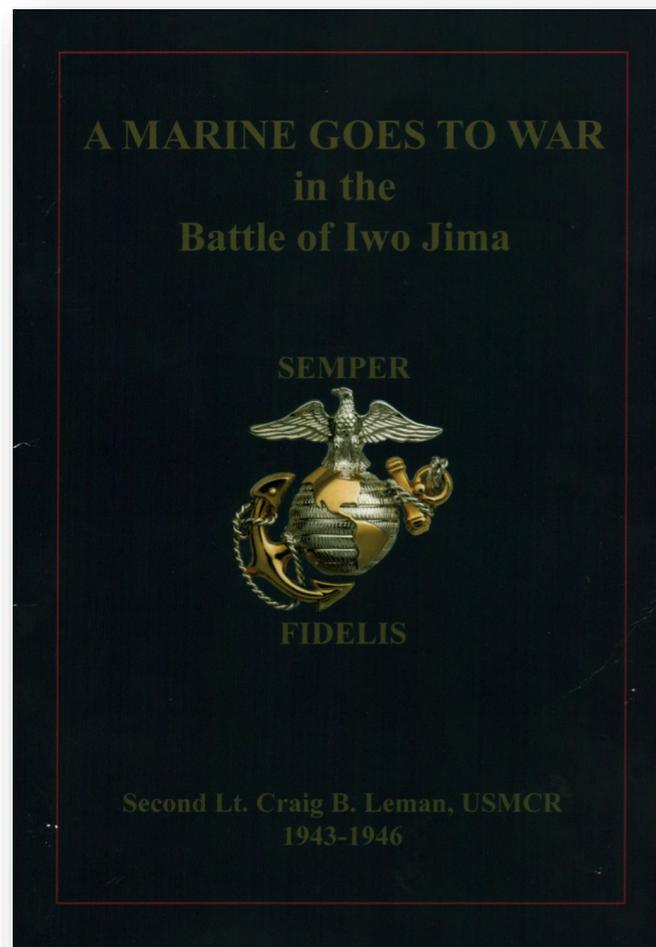
Leman rallied and organized the men remaining in the area and pressed forward in the attack despite the extreme conditions. He was shot in the back of the neck while leading an advance. With effort and the cover from his men, Leman made it back to a foxhole, and despite his injury, refused to leave his unit until his replacement came.



For his courage, initiative, and leadership in battle, Lemman was awarded the Silver Star as well as the Purple Heart.

After recovering from his injuries, Lemman trained in Hawaii for the planned invasion of Japan. When the atomic bomb was dropped, plans changed, and he became part of the occupation force. While there, Lemman was appalled by the effects the war had on Japan and its civilian population. Due to that experience, Lemman later became a member of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Following a month in Japan, Lemman served in the archipelago of Palau and, while fighting remnants of the Japanese army there, was tasked as the Operations Officer.

Lemman was discharged from the Marine Corps on March 1, 1946. He returned to the University of Chicago, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. With the aid of the G.I. Bill, he studied science subjects and went on to Harvard Medical School, where he earned a Doctor of Medicine degree in 1952. Following a residency in surgery at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Dr. Lemman became a partner at The Corvallis Clinic in Oregon, practicing general surgery and primary care.



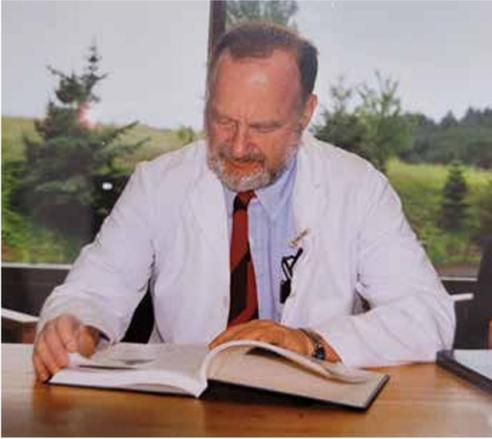


He also provided medical treatment in Palau and Alaska and volunteered aboard the hospital ship **SS HOPE** in Indonesia, Vietnam, Peru, and Guinea in Africa. He additionally served in the Sunflower House free medical clinic and provided care in Native American communities.

Dr. Leman taught bioethics at Oregon State University and served on its Institutional Review Board. He also advocated for public health initiatives such as smoking bans in public venues. In recognition of his service to medicine and community, he received the Oregon Medical Association's 1963 Doctor Citizen of the Year award.

In 1948, Leman married Nancy Farwell. They were married for sixty-six years and raised six children.

Dr. Craig B. Leman, USMCR, passed away in July 2014 at the age of 91.



COURTESY OF THE CORVALLIS CLINIC

**While attending medical school, Craig B. Leman visited recovering veterans and attributes his interest in medicine to his experience in the Marine Corps and on Iwo Jima.**



**Craig B. Leman trained with the 5thMarDiv at Camp Tarawa, Hawaii, to prepare for an invasion of Japan.**



COURTESY OF VALERIE LEMAN

**This is the helmet that was worn by Craig B. Leman when he was shot in the back of the neck by a sniper while on Iwo Jima. He survived and was treated at the division hospital.**



COURTESY OF VALERIE LEMAN

**Author Valerie Leman holding a Japanese flag. Valerie is the daughter of Craig B. Leman and is a board member of the 5th Marine Division Association, the same division that her father served in.**



***Patrick Organ***

*Presenting his Uncle Private First Class Patrick T. Organ, USMC*





*Private First Class Patrick T. Organ, USMC*



At 0650, the normal sounds of harassing artillery fire changed abruptly. Mortars, rockets, and machine-gun fire – most of it Japanese – ripped through the air, raising smoke and flame near Turkey Knob.



The unhappy recipients were the First Battalion, 25th Marines, and they were ahead of schedule. Their days of brutal fighting in the Amphitheater were a bloody routine. Watch the bombardment, make a frontal assault, fight like hell, up close and personal, for hours without flank support, then scramble back to the starting positions, cursing and crying and minus a few more of their buddies, only to repeat the pointless exercise the next morning. Someone suggested changing the routine and attacking without the bombardment – the shelling did little but wake the Japanese up, anyway – so Major Fenton Mee devised a daring double envelopment of the Turkey Knob. The plan required precise timing and the element of surprise – but if it worked, the 25th Marines would eliminate two of the major strongpoints in the Meat Grinder and spare themselves another bloodbath. Mee’s troops filtered quietly out of their foxholes and rushed forward 90 minutes earlier than anticipated.

“This was successful for the first fifteen minutes,” noted 1/25’s After Action Report. The Japanese discovered the bold move long before two key companies linked up, and Mee’s battalion once again found itself without flank support.[1] By the time the sun rose, it was too late to withdraw. Major Mee had no choice but to press on, and the din of the fight was an unwelcome preview for those Marines waiting to step off at 0800.

Corporal Tommy Lynchard had a knack for tracking the enemy – “you can almost smell Japs,” he said, “like you can a squirrel or deer” – and as he led his squad through a tangle of blasted brush, imagined for a moment that he was hunting back home in Mississippi. Very little escaped his notice. First, he spotted a single Japanese ration can. Then another. Then more and more, all recently scraped clean. Trouble was brewing. “Lynch” turned to motion his squad into a skirmish formation, and a bullet ripped into his shoulder. He fell to the ground and rolled into a shell hole as the squad scattered for cover, yelling for a corpsman.

Luckily, the assistant squad leader was a brave man. In moments, he was bandaging the wound using his own battle dressing. “You’re not supposed to give that to nobody else,” Lynchard recalled. “You might lose your own life if you don’t keep it to yourself.” The other Marine could see what Lynch could not – the bullet had smashed through his arm, nearly





Patrick Thoms Organ



BE-MEDALIED is Pvt. Patrick T. Organ, USMC, son of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Organ, Braxton St., East Hempstead. He has maintained a high average at Camp Lejeune, N. C.

### PVT. P. T. ORGAN KILLED ON IWO

#### Graduate Of Hempstead High Served As A Machine Gunner

Marine Private First Class Patrick T. Organ, a former student at Hempstead High school, lost his life last March, while serving as a machine gunner in battle at Iwo Jima, the navy announced today.

Also on Nassau's casualty report today are an airman killed in action and a soldier, a sailor, and a marine wounded in action.

The list follows:

#### Killed In Action

Private First Class Patrick T. Organ, U. S. M. C. R., son of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Organ of Braxton street, Hempstead.

#### Marine Killed At Iwo

Marine Private First Class Organ was killed in action at Iwo

Continued on Page 2, Col. 5

### PVT. P. T. ORGAN

(Continued from Page One)

Jima, on March 2, according to the telegram his parents received from the navy department.

The 21-year-old marine, who also attended Sewanhaka High school, joined the service in November, 1942. He had been overseas in the Pacific theater of operations for 14 months when he lost his life in battle.

His brother, Private First Class James Organ, is currently serving in the Pacific war area.

# Family Letters & Documents



May 28, 2023

**On what would have been his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, I want to honor my Uncle Pat, a man that gave his life in order for us to enjoy the freedoms that we have today.**

U.S.M.C. Pfc Patrick T. Organ enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corp – in his own words “I am willing to pay the price, if necessary, because I am helping to build a better world for Sis and all the kids to live in”- a reference to his sister Alice and his 4 other younger siblings.

I have put together this tribute containing letters that are a first-hand testament to his love of family, country, and dedication as a Marine.  
NOTE: The letters have been typed exactly as they were written.

In the upcoming months, I will have the privilege to visit the place of Uncle Pat’s final days as a U.S. Marine – the Japanese-held volcanic island of Iwo Jima. This is a trip I have long waited to make.

I am proud to have him as my namesake – and also proud to pass this set of very private, inspiring, personal notes to my family and friends.

Semper Fi, Marine and thank you.

Pat

# IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Patrick Thomas Organ

Born May 28, 1923

Killed in Action March 2, 1945 on Iwo Jima

Beloved Son, brother, uncle, and friend



Private First Class, 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, U.S. Marine Corps

Feb. 3, 1945

Dear Mom:

Just a few lines letting you know that I am fine and hope you and all home are the same.

I'm sorry I didn't write sooner, but I couldn't because I was busy. I am now aboard ship going to battle but as of yet don't know where. I'll write to you again as soon as it's over or before if I can. I hope I run into Bud someplace around. Don't worry either because there isn't anything to worry about. You know they can't kill a good irish man. I've been waiting for this chance for two years now and I'm out to do my best. How have you been these weeks. I sure miss writing and hearing from you but someday soon we'll be able to talk instead of write. (How about it.) Tell all the kids I said hello and also my love to them: I got quite a few letters from all around and they'll be mad for me not writing but I'm sorry for them. So Tommy quit the store. It's a good thing because there all the same to work for. Tell pop I said hello and don't work too hard.

I'll write again my next chance.

Love and kisses to all

Your Marine

Pat

Pfc Patrick T. Organ



*The Original of Uncle Pat's last letter to his Mom.  
He was killed almost a month to the day later.*

Feb. 3/1945

Dear Mom:

Just a few lines letting you know that I am fine, and hope you and all home are the same.

I'm sorry I didn't write sooner, but I couldn't because I was busy. I am now aboard ship going to battle, but as yet don't know where I'll write to you again as soon as it's over or before if I can. I hope I run into Bud's someplace around. Don't worry either because there isn't anything to worry about. You know they can't kill a good Irish man. I've been waiting for this chance for two years now and I'm out to do my best. How have you been these weeks. I sure miss hearing and hearing from you but someday soon we'll be able to talk instead of write. (How about it.) Tell all the kids I said hello and also my love to them. I got quite a few letters from all around and they'll be mad for me not writing but I'm sorry for them. So I'm going quit the store. It's

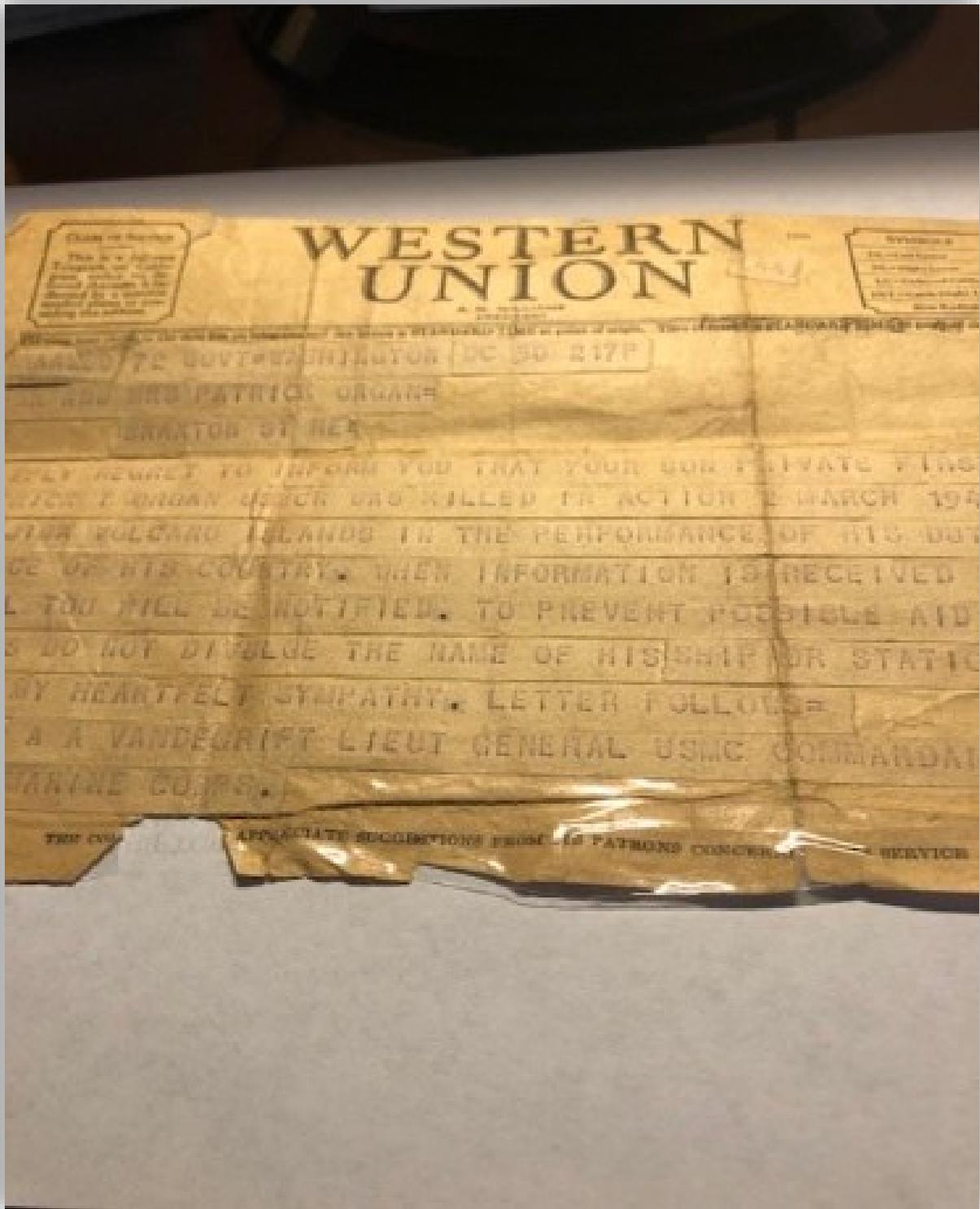
a good thing because then all the same  
to work for. Tell pop I said hello  
and don't work too hard.

I'll write again my next  
chance.

Love + kisses to all  
Yours, Maurice  
Pat.

Of Patrick T Organ

*The Original Western Union notifying my grandparents*



NAA260 72 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 30 217P

MR. AND MRS. PATRICK ORGAN  
BRAXTON STE HEMP

DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON PRIVATE FIRST CLASS PATRICK T. ORGAN WAS KILLED IN ACTION 2 MARCH 1945 AT IWO JIMA VOLCANO ISLANDS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS DUTY AND SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY. WHEN INFORMATION IS RECEIVED REGARDING BURIAL YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED. TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES DO NOT DIVULGE THE NAME OF HIS SHIP OR STATION. PLEASE ACCEPT MY HEARTFELT SYMPATHY. LETTER FOLLOWS.

A A VANDERGRIFT LIEUT GENERAL USMC  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS



19-March 1945  
Pacific Area

Dear Mrs. Organ,

Words cannot adequately express my sorrow and sympathies to you for the loss of your son P.F.C. Patrick T. Organ.

Pat joined us after our Saipan-Tinian operation and was one of the better men in the company. He was well liked and he himself seemed to like his work and always did an excellent job in any field.

He was killed 2 March 1945 on Iwo Jima, and is now buried in the 4<sup>th</sup> Div. Cemetery there. His grave is No. 1298, Plot 1, Row 26. He is buried near many of his friends.

Pat was killed by enemy mortar fire as we were moving out in the attack. He was with his best friend Corp. L.R. Palardy, of whom he may have spoken. They were leading the men in that attack when the barrage hit us. Both your son and Corp. Palardy were hit by the shrapnel and died instantly. Pat was doing an excellent job and had been throughout the operation outstanding. He was always cheerful, willing to help those around him who needed physical and spiritual aid. Our casualties were heavy that day but would have been worse were it not for men like your son leading and directing and actually being an inspiration to those around him.

You have lost a good son, we lost a fine Marine and a wonderful friend. I'm sure when conditions permit that you will receive letters from many of his friends.

If there is anything I can do or any other information you desire please write me.

One item which may help some that I omitted, Pat was buried with full military honors, and the rites of his church. His grave is now marked by a white plaque with his name, rank, and serial number. It's a beautiful cemetery and well cared for.

May I repeat, if there is anything at all that you wish to know concerning him, please feel free to write at any time.

Sincerely,  
Roy I Wood Jr.  
1<sup>st</sup> Lt. U.S.M.C.  
Commanding Officer

***Uncle Pat's Commanding Officer that wrote to my grandmother***

The Original Letter from Uncle Pat's Commanding Officer

Dear Mrs. Organ:

Words can not adequately express my sorrow and sympathies to you for the loss of your son P.F.C. Patrick F. Organ.

Pat joined us after our Saipan-Tinian operation and was one of the better men in the company. He was well liked and he himself seem to like his work and always did an excellent job in any field.

He was killed 2 March 1945 on Iwo Jima, and is now

buried in the 4th Div. Cemetery there. His grave is No. 1278, Plot 1, Row 26. He is buried near many of his friends.

Pat was killed by enemy mortar fire as we were moving out in the attack. He was with his best friend Corp. L.R. Palardy, of whom he may have spoken. They were leading the men in that attack when the barrage hit us. Both your son and Corp. Palardy were hit by the shrapnel and died instantly. Pat was doing an excellent job and had been throughout the operation, outstanding. He was always cheerful, willing

to help those around him who needed physical and spiritual aid. Our casualties were heavy that day but would have been worse, were it not for men like your son leading and directing and actually being an inspiration to those around him.

You have lost a good son, we lost a fine Marine and a wonderful friend. I'm sure when conditions permit that you will receive letters from many of his friends.

If there is anything I can do or any other information you desire please write me.

One item which may help some that I omitted

Pat was buried with full military honors, and the rites of this church. His grave is now marked by a white plaque with his name, rank, and serial number. It's a beautiful cemetery and well cared for.

May I repeat, if there is anything at all ~~that~~ that you wish to know concerning him, please feel free to write at any time.

Sincerely,  
Ray J. Wood Jr.  
1st Lt. U.S.M.C.  
Commanding Officer

Dear Mrs. Organ  
Thurs / 10/ 45

I received a letter from Lil yesterday and I heard about Pat. I am very sorry that it had to be Pat. There are fellows dying every day Mom and I always knew sooner or later that one of us guys that paled around together would get it. Any one of us may be next Mom. Maybe Pete, maybe, Joe, me or Murphy. Who knows? We have a job to do and we do it because it has to be done, no matter what the Price is.

Pat once told me when I met him overseas. He said Bill if anything happens to me, tell Mom not to feel bad. He said "I am willing to pay the price if necessary because I am helping to build a better world for Sis and all the kids to live in. Tell little Ellen to be good and teach the kids to make use of the Liberty we fought for. He said tell Mom I love her for all she has done for me. Kiss her for me and kiss Ellen for me too."

Pat is a fellow I will never forget. He was kind and generous and the closest friend I ever had. To me Pat is not dead because I have too many pleasant memories which could never die. There are Marines, thousands of them getting revenge for Pat and all the boys who died already. I personally will settle Pat's score for him although it could never return Pat to us but it will make me feel much better if I can get my hands on some of those little yellow dogs.

Before Pat passed away, he took a good many Japs with him if I know Pat. He was a fighting Irishman and one of the best people I ever knew.

I am in the Western Pacific area and in a position where I can start paying them back for Pat. If it takes the rest of my life I will pay them back to the last (dead) Jap for Pat. I am closer to Japan then Pat was and I hope someday I will get to the heart of Tokyo where I can do some damage. Any Jap I get lined in my sights is as good as dead.

Keep your chin up Mom. Pat wouldn't want you to feel bad about him. When I get home maybe I can take the place or try to be a son to you and my Mom both if you would let me try.

**(Letter is unsigned)**

*The Original Letter to my grandmother from Uncle Pat's friend, Bill*

Dear Ma Cogan. I                      Thurs 11/10/45  
I received a letter from ~~you~~ yesterday  
and I heard about Pat. I am very  
sorry that it had to be Pat. I know  
fellow going every day. Mom and  
I always knew sooner or later one  
of us guys that pulled around together  
would get it. Any one of us may  
be next from Maki. (Pat, me, or  
Joe) me or Maki. Whatever.  
We have a job to do and we  
do it because it has to be done  
no matter what the price is.  
Pat once told me when I met  
him over seas. He said. If  
anything happens to the old man  
not to feel bad. He said. I  
am willing to pay the price if  
necessary, because I am helping  
to build a better world for us

and all the kids to live in. Tell  
little Ellen to be good and teach  
the kids to make use of the  
things we fought for. He said  
to Mom I owe her for all she  
had done for me. Kiss her for  
me and tell Ellen for me too.  
Pat was a fellow I will never  
forget. He was kind and generous  
and my closest friend I ever  
had. To me Pat isn't dead because  
I have so many pleasant memories  
which could never die. There  
are ~~thousands~~ thousands of them  
getting revenge for Pat and all  
the boys who died alongside  
personally will settle the balance  
for him although it could  
never return Pat to us but it  
will make me feel much  
better if I can get my hands  
on some of those little yellow  
(continued) the letter

(Continued from other letter)  
Dogs. Before Pat passed away  
he took a good many japs with  
him if I know Pat. He was a  
fighting Irishman and one  
of the best people I ever know.  
I am in the western Pacific  
area and in a position where  
I can start sending them  
back for Pat. If it takes the  
rest of my life I will pay them  
back to the last dead jap for  
Pat. I am down in Japan now  
Pat was and I hope some day  
I will get to the heart of  
Tokyo where I can do some damage.  
Any jap I get lined in my sight  
is as good as dead.  
Keep your chin up Mom,  
Pat wouldn't want you to feel  
bad about him. When I get home  
Maki I can take the place or  
try to be a son to you and my  
Mom both of you let me try.



Information from the National Archives and Records Administration  
Navy Department Files

**Pfc Patrick T. Organ**

Branch of Service: U.S. Marine Corps

Hometown: Hempstead, NY

Status: KIA



USMCR World War II

PFC Patrick T. Organ KIA Iwo Jima March 2, 1945

Unit Company A, 1st Battalion 24th Marines 4th Marine Division, FMF

Hometown: Hempstead, NY

Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Organ

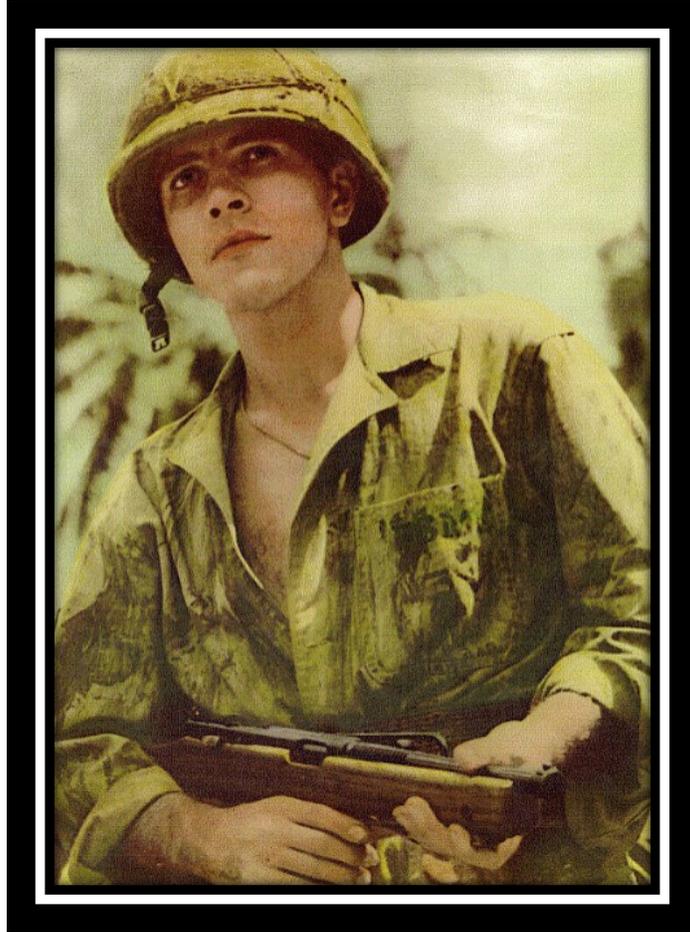
service# 502419

Awards: World War II Victory Medal, Purple Heart



***Kathy Strank Kasper***  
***Presenting her Uncle Sergeant Michael Strank, USMC***





***Sergeant Michael Strank, USMC***



**The following is from The Michael Strank Project at [www.Strank.org](http://www.Strank.org).  
In the annals of time and history, Sergeant Michael Strank of the United States Marine Corps will forever be known as one of the six men who raised “the flag” on top of Mount Suribachi during the World War II battle of Iwo Jima.**



With the 1/400th of a second shutter flash from the camera of Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, Strank and his military brethren Corporal Harlon Block, Private First Class Franklin Sousley, Private First Class Ira Hayes, Marine PFC Harold Keller, and Marine CPL Harold Schultz became household names.

The photograph gave hope and became a symbol of support and endurance for the United States war effort. With one click, Rosenthal captured a lasting image of Sgt. Strank, a Marines' Marine, a beloved leader of men who vowed to do anything in his power to bring his soldiers home. To truly understand the life of Michael Strank, we must look past the photograph.

The story of this American hero, oddly enough, begins in Jarabina, Czechoslovakia where he was born Mychal Strenk on November 10, 1919; ironically the 144th anniversary of the founding of the United States Marine Corps. Mychal lived in a one room house with a dirt floor with his father Vasil, mother Martha, and extended family. Vasil, chasing the famed American dream, immigrated to the United States in 1920, changing his last name to Strank in the process.

Vasil settled in the Pennsylvania mining and steel working town of Franklin Borough, just east of Johnstown. Working for Bethlehem Steel, Vasil labored in the Cambria County mines for three years until he could afford to send for Martha and Mychal. Finally, in early 1922, Mychal and his mother were able to join Vasil in America.

The first ten years in America would be a trans-formative time for both the Strank family and Mychal. Mychal, renamed Mike, who was soon joined by two younger brothers, John and Pete, as well as a younger sister named Mary. Vasil was able to afford a two-room rental apartment for his growing family, seen as a castle by Martha when compared to their living arrangements in Czechoslovakia. Though the blast furnaces ran 24 hours a day and coal dust added a permanent black haze to the town, the Stranks saw Franklin Borough as a place for their children to grow and their lives to improve.

Vasil worked nights and slept during the days but stayed optimistic and saw each day as progress. Above all, the head of the Strank family loved his children, and he guided over them with a system of discipline from the Old World. The basis of which is engrained in the Marine

Corps values of training: equal discipline. When one child (Marine) committed an offense, all children (the Marine's unit) were punished. Vasil unknowingly began preparing Mike for his time in the Marine Corps by instilling in him the value of shared responsibility; the Marines' Marine was beginning to take shape.

As the Strank family began to gain a foothold in the borough, Michael Strank's personal transformation from a boy to a young man was unfolding. Already with a rigid sense of discipline and duty, Strank approached all things with passion and resolve. He was as fervent about the Catholic faith as he was eager to learn the English language and customs. When he began first grade, he knew no English but became fluent in it within the year. He quickly learned to play the French horn and even hit a home run out of Johnstown's Point Stadium. He saved his brother John from a nearly fatal mining accident and calmed his younger brothers during the Johnstown Flood of 1936. He was a tutor, mentor, brother and friend. That was Mike.

The Strank family was flourishing now, renting out a five-room duplex while living in one of their own. Vasil and Martha had truly achieved the American dream; then the Great Depression found Western Pennsylvania. Wages were low, workers were striking, and Vasil lost his job. Sadly for a gifted boy like Mike, college was now out of the question.

Mike was looking for work and found it in one of the many programs created by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. In 1937, Mike joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a governmental organization that worked on projects ranging from roads to national parks. For 18 months he worked across the country in places such as Arizona before eventually coming back to Pennsylvania to work on highways. Much like Vasil's system at home, the CCC exposed Mike to a military-like regimen complete with camp life, discipline, and comradery. Though denied an extension with the program, the CCC had turned Mike from a 140 pound boy into a strapping 180-pound man. A man, full of passion and the desire to do what was right, had only one place to turn.

The year was 1939 and Hitler's Nazi Germany was on a war path through Eastern Europe, including Mike's home country of Czechoslovakia. Mike, hearing of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, had no choice but to act. The young immigrant joined the Marines. Though an American citizen due to his father's citizenship, Mike was still considered Czech and could have avoided World War II completely, but that wasn't who Mike was.

On October 6, 1939, in Pittsburgh, Mike enlisted and became the only one of the 6 flag raisers to join the armed forces before the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was shipped to Parris Island, South Carolina for boot camp and excelled. He continued to be a leader, except now it wasn't John or Pete he was leading, but other marines.

Private First Class Michael Strank was next shipped to Guantanamo Bay where he and his fellow Marines practiced amphibious assaults on Caribbean islands, much like the island assaults that Marines would be doing a year later in the Pacific. By the time the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, Strank was back in South Carolina training new Marines and becoming a Sergeant in the process.

In March of 1942, Mike returned home for a short time where his family easily identified the mental and physical changes he had experienced. Sergeant Michael Strank had become the Marine prototype: tough, driven, and determined. Three months later Mike was called into

combat, not to his war-torn homeland, but to the small islands that pockmarked the Pacific, islands now ruled by the unpredictable Empire of Japan.

The Marine Raiders were known as the toughest group of soldiers in the Pacific theater of war. The men you would send into the worse environments to complete the toughest of missions. Being outnumbered and behind enemy lines was typical for this unit. Sgt. Mike Strank was a Marine Raider. By now, Mike was 6 foot and closing in on two hundred pounds of pure muscle. He was a charismatic leader who used his intelligence in all facets of Marine life.

Mike loved the Raiders for their style of fighting as well as their focus on brotherhood and shared responsibility. He got his feet wet in assaults on the islands of Uvea and Pavuvu where the Marine Raiders met little resistance. Then Mike landed on the Island of Bougainville. Bougainville was a key stop for the island-hopping strategy of the Allied Forces. Not only were the Japanese hostile on Bougainville, but so was the terrain. Deadly insects, torrential downpours, and sacred skull shrines were just a few of the many troubles encountered by the Marines there. As one Marine stated, Bougainville is, "the closest thing to hell that I ever saw in my life."

Sgt. Strank landed on Bougainville on D-Day, November 1, 1943, with 14,000 other Marines. There he saw the gruesome deaths of his fellow Marines on an unimaginable scale. The men he would lead into battle were being cut down to his left and right; falling, crawling, bleeding, and dying. The Pacific Ocean around Bougainville was dyed red by an enemy they could not see. Dense jungle and concrete bunkers masked the faces of those slaughtering these young Americans.

Even when the beach was secure, the killing continued. As the Americans pursued the Japanese into the jungle, more and more fell beside Sgt. Strank. American intelligence had greatly under-appreciated the Japanese force, and they were paying for it with the lives of Marines. Mike fought for two months on the bloody island of Bougainville, until the campaign came to an end. Bougainville changed Michael Strank forever, he aged years in a matter of months, and now fully understood what the true price for freedom was: death. The death of the men he served under, the death of the men he led, and eventually, Sgt. Strank came to realize, his own death as well.

Strank, weakened by malaria and battle, returned to Franklin Borough on a short leave. His sister Mary remembers Mike using this time to rest and recuperate, refusing neighbors request to talk about war, and instead staying in with his family on most days. One night, two friends took Mike out on the town where they saw a movie about the war. When asked what he thought about it, Mike quietly stated, "It isn't really like that."

At the end of the night, Mike said goodbye to his friends for what he believed would be the last time, revealing that he didn't think he would be coming back from war. Sgt. Mike Strank was sure his next battle would be his last. Though convinced of his impending demise, Mike never tried to prevent his self-conceived fate.

Vasil, his father, wanted Mike to request a training assignment in the states so he could be closer to the family. Even with the horrors of Bougainville branded in his mind, Mike refused. "Dad there's a war going on out there. Young boys are fighting that war. And Dad – they need my help." A Marines' Marine, a veteran of three Island invasions, would lead his men into battle

whatever his fate may be. Before leaving, Mike urged his sister to keep using the English language with her parents and to keep writing letters to him; even if she never got any in return.

Sgt. Strank left Franklin Borough for the West Coast and reassignment, never to see home again. Mike, along with the five other flag raisers, was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, 5th Marine Division stationed at Camp Pendleton in Southern California. Camp Pendleton was large, desolate, and unforgiving. In other words, the perfect place to mold Marines into the fighting form needed to defeat Japan. Training was nothing but intense. Mike and his fellow Marines drilled with weapons and boats, ran and hiked with full equipment, and even fought wildfires.

Through it all the Marines created a brotherhood, echoed in their motto of Semper Fidelis, meaning always faithful, faithful to their cause, country, and most importantly each other. Through training, Mike emerged as a leader who his men both respected and liked. As one Marine stated, "Everybody liked Mike. He was a born leader, a natural leader, and a leader by example."

Harlon, Ira, Franklin all loved him... "He had a real concern for us, he was a big brother to us. We were young boys and he would assure us. "He would say, 'I want to bring as many of you back home to your mothers as possible.'" Mike led by example, but it was his use of humor that really calmed the men around him. He wrote funny poems about camp life, held seances, and joked about his humble beginnings. He gave pills (pieces of chocolate) to his men for pick-me-ups, drank with them on weekends, and commanded them again once Monday rolled around.

He was known to be one of the best squad leaders in Easy Company while running one of the best firing teams in the regiment. Officers respected him while privates wanted to be him. Michael Strank was the perfect man to lead Marines on the next big mission; the assault of "Island X." Island X was a term used liberally in the Marine Corps as codename for an island they were planning on attacking.

While the true destination of Island X was classified and only known by a select few, enlisted men made guesses as to where their next destination might be. Some believed it was "the big one," the invasion of mainland Japan. Others predicted another stop on a small Pacific island that would be inconsequential if not for it being occupied by Japanese soldiers. For most, it did not matter. Marine training was regimented to fit the specifics needed to take Island X.

The training was harsh and repetitive, but essential for the mission at hand. It began at Camp Pendleton and continued after the Marines shipped out of San Diego and landed in Hawaii. Predictably, the Marines did not experience the palm trees and lush beaches that they dreamed of, instead, they experienced Camp Tarawa. Camp Tarawa was full of lava rocks, rigid cliffs, and knife sharp ridges. It shared similar terrain with Island X, making it the perfect spot to train Marines. They would drill maneuvers day after day until they could be performed in one's sleep, or even better, under heavy enemy fire. Marines spent over four months at Camp Tarawa until they shipped off to Honolulu for one final liberty before battle.

On liberty, Mike was able to meet up and reminisce with some old buddies from his former Marine Raiders unit. Then in late January, Mike, Harlon, Ira, Franklin, Rene, and Doc boarded the USS Missoula to depart for the mission they have been training for. The flag raisers

finally learned the identity of Island X, a small Pacific island called Iwo Jima, an island these six men will be intrinsically linked to for the rest of time.

Iwo Jima, which translates to "Sulfur Island," was a forsaken and sinister place. At its southwestern tip sits Mount Suribachi, an inactive volcano whose eruptions built the island. Rocks, ridges, and black sand grow to the North and East of the mountain, resembling a charred pork chop to the men who photographed it from above. It seemed void of any life but the soldiers occupying it and as one Japanese soldier poetically called it, "A place no sparrow sings."

Though seeming unimportant, Iwo Jima was a critical island to control for both the United States and Japan. For the United States, it was strategically significant for many reasons. It contained a number of airfields that the Japanese used to launch attacks from. If captured, American pilots could use the airfields to both launch attacks as well as to make emergency landings. Bombing runs that were headed to the Japanese mainland flew right over Iwo Jima, so capturing the island would give clear skies for American pilots.

The Japanese saw the significance of Iwo Jima from a more emotional standpoint. Up to this time, the opposing forces were warring over islands that the Japanese captured at the start of the war. Iwo Jima, however, has always been part of the Japanese Empire and the Japanese were determined to defend it as if it was an attack on Tokyo. Almost unknowingly, Mike, Easy Company, and the rest of the Marines were beginning the direct invasion of Japan.

The 28th Marine Regiment, including Mike and the rest of the flag raisers, had a special mission to accomplish when they hit the beaches of Iwo Jima. They would land on "Green Beach," the closest beach to Mount Suribachi, and be tasked with cutting the volcano off from the rest of the island. The elevation of Suribachi made it the most strategically significant formation on the island and it was the goal of the Marines to capture it as quickly as possible.

The men of Easy Company knew the dangers involved in taking the well defended Suribachi and relied on the leadership of men like Michael Strank to prepare them for the onslaught. The Marines had years' worth of training, but most would be new to combat. Again, Strank's calming presence and use of humor relaxed his men and put them in better spirits. They loved the way his helmet was cocked to one side and the jokes he told in dialect from the old country. Most of all, they wholeheartedly believed that Sgt. Mike Strank would do anything in his power to get them home. Mike cared for his men, and used his rank as Sergeant to protect and watch over them.

In fact, weeks before the battle, Mike was offered the rank of Platoon Sergeant, a position that would get him further out of harm's way. Mike immediately turned down the promotion; he promised his boys he would be there for them. While Mike was optimistic regarding the survival of his men, he became grim in nature regarding his own demise. The night before the Marines landed on the black beaches of Iwo Jima, Mike once again admitted his impending death, this time to a nearby Marine. "I'm not coming back from this one."

Since December of 1944, Allied forces bombed Iwo Jima to hell and back. Three days before the attack, the U.S. Navy intermittently bombed the black island as well. Many believed that the bombing did the trick and that all Marines would encounter would be small groups of Japanese soldiers surrounded by their dead comrades. They were wrong.

The Japanese, commanded by their leader General Kuribayashi, began building tunnels. For months, the island defenders built a series of linked tunnels that connected the island underneath rock and sand. Entrances turned into concrete bunkers and hidden pillboxes. The Japanese were essentially untouched by the bombing. The aerial photographs captured none of this. The Marines were going in blind.

On February 19, 1945, Marines hit the beaches of Iwo Jima. The first wave of Marines, ultimately including Mike and Easy Company, encountered no opposition. For an hour, men and machines poured onto the beach creating a crowded condition in the compact space. The Americans bogged down their own landing zone and General Kuribayashi, awaiting this opportunity, gave the command to attack.

The barren island of Iwo Jima came alive. Machine guns, mortars, and heavy artillery opened up on the condensed Marines creating death at every turn. The dormant volcano Suribachi erupted once more, but instead of flowing hot lava it projected hot lead. The tunnels and bunkers concealed Japanese movements from the Marines, leaving no true target to shoot at but the flash of a barrel. This was a Marine's worst nightmare.

Mike and his platoon landed north of their destination and had to rendezvous with Easy Company in the midst of the massacre. As men were either running, hiding, or dying, a strange sight appeared to the men of Strank's squad. "There was Mike, sitting upright, emptying the sand out of his boots. Just as if nothing was happening." Mike Strank was a combat veteran; he understood the importance of cleaning out your boots. He also understood the keys to moving under fire.

Mike led his men back to the rendezvous point, moving between the squad members and making sure they were spread out. Eventually they reached Easy Company and the actions of Sgt. Strank easily saved many lives that day. However, it didn't make him feel any better about his own. "This is my third campaign," Strank told a Marine he was sharing a foxhole with, "and I'm not going to make it through this one." The beachhead was finally secure. For Mike and Easy Company, the next three days would be spent cutting off Suribachi from the rest of the island while facing its fury head on.

On D-Day +1, Mike, Harlon, Ira, and Franklin moved behind the cover of an American tank to rescue wounded Marines. Casualties mounted, heroes died, and Mike and the flag raisers moved forward. On D-Day +2, battered Marines relied on their training at Camp Pendleton and Camp Tarawa to move forward through death and destruction. They slowly zig-zagged their way toward the base of the mountain suffering astronomical casualties along the way.

When the taking of the mountain seemed imminent, a large group of Japanese soldiers exited Suribachi with the intent of performing a banzai (suicidal) charge towards Easy Company. After being fired upon by American fighter planes, it was Sgt. Strank who first stood up from cover and proclaimed, "Let's show these bastards what a real banzai is like! Easy Company, charge!" Casualties mounted, heroes died, and Mike and the flag raisers moved forward. On D-Day +3, Suribachi was surrounded. Japanese soldiers would attempt to escape the mountain, only to meet a quick death. They realized what the Marine command realized, Suribachi had fallen, and it was time to climb.

At 10:20 a.m. on February 23, 1945, the American Flag was hoisted on top of Mount Suribachi; the first flag that is. After a four-man patrol climbed to the top of the mountain unharmed, a forty-man platoon from Easy Company (not Mike's) cautiously made their way to the brim of the dormant volcano.

Encountering little resistance, the platoon of Marines found a pole, tied an American flag to it, and raised it. The sight brought sweeping emotion across the Marines both on the mountain and at its base below. Men were cheering, ships were blasting their horns, and the Japanese understood Suribachi belonged to the Marines. A picture of the event was taken, the Marines in it were heroes, and it could have been their photograph hung on every wall in America. But it wasn't. The Secretary of the Navy wanted the Suribachi flag as a souvenir, a decision that sent Mike and the flag raisers on a crash course with destiny.

The flag was planted by Marines, so in the eyes of Easy Company's commander, the battalion were the ones who deserved to keep it. The search for a replacement flag was on until they found one that had been pulled from a sinking ship at Pearl Harbor. The flag was handed to Rene Gagnon who was told to join Mike Strank's squad, who had been ordered to run telephone line to the top of the mountain.

Mike, Harlon, Ira, Franklin, and Rene slowly began their ascent up Suribachi with the orders to take down the original flag and put up the replacement. When they reached the peak, Mike told the commanding officer that they were to take the original flag down and run the replacement flag up high, "So every son of a bitch on this whole cruddy island can see it!" They found a clear spot and Harlon began creating a base for the flag while Ira and Franklin searched for a pole.

Meanwhile, Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal reached the top of the mountain with the knowledge that he missed the original flag raising. He was content with taking pictures of the view from the top of Mount Suribachi, until he saw Mike's squad preparing to raise the replacement flag. By now they had the pole and Mike unfurled the flag and attached it, still holding it in his hand so it would not touch the ground or flutter in the wind.

With Harlon at its base and Mike, Franklin, and Ira behind him; the men began to raise the flag. Mike saw John "Doc" Bradley and called for help. The Navy Corpsman, as well as Rene Gagnon, joined in behind Harlon and pushed forward. As the pole moved to a more upright position Mike let go of the flag, Rosenthal took a picture, and a second later the replacement flag was waving over Mount Suribachi. There was no cheer or blasting of horns and there was a good chance that not every son of the bitch on the cruddy Island could see it. But thanks to the 1/400th of a second shutter flash from the camera of Joe Rosenthal, soon the whole world would.

The fame and popularity of the photograph and the Marines pictured in it spread like wildfire once it reached the states, but Michael Strank would not live long enough to ever find this out. After staying near the mountain for five more days, Easy Company's regiment was ordered to move north to relieve a battered regiment of Marine brethren. The night before moving out, Mike Strank once again predicted his demise to a fellow Marine. On the following day, his prophecy became true.

On March 1, 1945, in the shadows of Suribachi, Strank led his men over bloody ground to a rocky outcropping that protected them from Japanese fire. As he prepared to draw a plan in the sand, a plan that would get his men out of danger and one step closer to home, a shell exploded. The impact took Sergeant Michael Strank in the chest, killing him instantly and ripping out his heart that once beat for his men, his cause, and his country.

The shell did not come from the enemy, though, as the only unprotected side of the outcropping faced towards the ocean, where American destroyers were anchored. The Japanese could not kill Michael Strank, but his own country could.

Michael Strank was the American dream personified, the immigrant turned dutiful Marine who led his brothers as a child like he led his brothers in arms as a young man. The boy from a steel town used humor, courage, and calming presence to gain the respect of all who served with him. Michael Strank was a Marine's Marine, a larger-than-life hero, and he was dead at the age of 24.

The Battle of Iwo Jima raged on, claiming the lives of two more flag raisers in the process, Harlon Block and Franklin Sousley. Meanwhile, the impact of Mike Strank's death was being felt at home. When a Western Union man with a yellow slip of paper appeared at the Strank's door in Franklin Borough, their world was turned upside down.

With her son Pete in the Navy and Mike in the Marines, Martha expected the worse. She was too emotional to read it, pleading with the Western Union man to read it aloud. He finally consented, against company policies, and delivered the news of Mike's death to his mother. Her hair turned white within a couple months; it was as black as Pennsylvania coal before she learned of her son's death.

Returning home from a memorial service for Mike, the Strank's first heard of Mike's place in the iconic flag raising image. Friends, neighbors, and media surrounded their home and asked them questions about their fallen American hero. Home from the war, the three surviving flag raisers were tasked with selling war bonds required to pay for the final invasion of Japan.

Ira Hayes, John Bradley, and Rene Gagnon were celebrities as they traveled the country, denying rumors of the photo being staged or the fact that the flag was planted under an intense battle. They denied their heroics, claiming the heroes of Iwo Jima died on the island. They put on smiles, said a few key phrases, and did their best to hide their pain while selling bonds. Martha Strank was able to come aboard on some stops on the bond drive to represent her fallen son. With Vasil too saddened by Mike's death to attend, Martha and her son John traveled to New York City. When Ira Hayes saw Martha, he hugged her tight and broke down. As Martha would learn, Ira loved and respected Mike, like all Marines who knew her son.

Even when the war came to an end, the Strank's were still affected by its repercussions. Pete returned home a shell of his former self, having survived the fiery explosion of his naval ship caused by a Japanese kamikaze pilot. His nerves were gone and he acted erratically, suffering from the horrors he witnessed at war. As his brother John came to say, "I lost two brothers in the Pacific war."

In 1947, Mike's body, which was buried in the black sands of Iwo Jima, was brought home for a proper burial. The Marine's Marine was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, a

place fitting for a man like Michael Strank. The service was attended by his entire immediate family.

Visitors, from everyday people to the likes of President Truman, came to Franklin Borough years after the war, to ask questions about Mike or to pay their respects to the Stranks. The last major event that the Strank's attended was the unveiling of the Iwo Jima Memorial on November 10, 1954; the shared birthdays of Sergeant Michael Strank and the Marine Corps.

The memorial was a bronze statue of the Rosenthal photograph of the flag raising on Iwo Jima. The Strank's saw the depiction of Mike, huddled behind Franklin Sousley, guiding his soldier's hand along the flagpole; a lasting image of a consummate leader. Pictures were taken, goodbyes were said, and the six families brought together by the 1/400th of a second shutter flash went their separate ways.

On the Iwo Jima Memorial there is no mention of the six men who raised the flag. Even the photographer, Joe Rosenthal, receives no recognition. The bronze figures have no identity. Only one inscription boldly appears on the statue, and it reads, "**UNCOMMON VALOR WAS A COMMON VIRTUE.**"

During the Battle of Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue among Marines fighting there. But the heroic acts on Iwo Jima are just one example of the patriotism so commonly found in the World War II generation. The men who landed on the beaches in Normandy or the pilots who dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed incredibly bravery.

Valor was ever present on the home front as well as factories altered production to make canteens, rifles, boots, and other war supplies. Car companies began making military vehicles as everyday citizen's rationed food and provisions so there would be more for the soldiers overseas. Women rose to new heights in the workplace as minorities contributed greatly both at work and at war. The nation was immersed in the war effort at every level. It is often asked how an entire generation of Americans was able to come together at a time of heightened danger and vulnerability. For that answer, one must look at their past.

The World War II generation are products of The Great Depression. Men and woman who above all else learned the art of survival. Many had little money, scraps for food, and no place to sleep. Children found work at young ages and took on adult roles because there was no adults around to fill them. They lived day by day, relying on one another, because that's all they could do.

So, when World War II began, the American people reacted instinctually. They worked for each other, fought for each other, and died for each other. The World War II generation became the resilient force that they had been during The Great Depression. Maybe it is not so surprising after all, then, that American's like Michael Strank showed such uncommon valor when the country need it the most.

The lasting image of the flag raising on Iwo Jima is one that will reverberate through the sands of time. It has become one of the most reproduced photographs in history as its lasting appeal has transcended generations. The photograph, and subsequent memorial, has become a rallying cry for every Marine that has ever worn the uniform.

The American people look to it as a sign of strength and perseverance even in the darkest of hours. The men in the photograph, Mike, Harlon, Ira, Franklin, Doc, and Rene will forever be linked to that moment in time. But for those who died on Iwo Jima, like Michael Strank, the flag raising was just another part of the mission.

Mary, Mike's sister, is convinced that her brother, like the surviving flag raisers, would have been uncomfortable with the attention paid to him. "He wouldn't have wanted the fame," Mary has said. "He would have said he was just doing his job." Job well done then, Sergeant Strank, job well done.

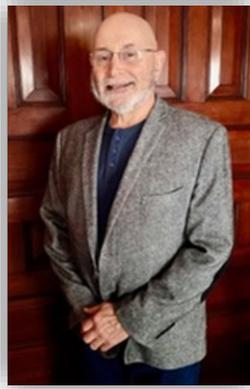


The Strank Project evolved through the efforts of these Cambria County veterans groups:

- Veterans Memorial Monument, Inc.
- Franklin VFW
- Conemaugh Valley Veterans
- Marine Corps League Detachment 287

The groups were brought together and the coordinating vision for The Strank Project was provided by Robert Eyer, a Viet Nam veteran and managing partner of Wessel and Company, CPA. He was aptly assisted by Claudine Seitz, a personable, dedicated and highly organized professional. The Strank Project video, ***Our Flag Still Waves***, was produced by WIX PIX Productions, Inc., Dale Wicks, writer-director.

We are grateful to all who are helping The Strank Project in so many different ways.



***Tony Mariano***  
***Presenting his Father Frank Mariano***





***Corporal Frank Mariano, USMC***



Francis (Frank) Mariano graduated from Canastota High School in 1942. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in November of that year and underwent basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina.

During World War II, he served in military action on Enjietok Atoll in the Marshall Islands, as well as on Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima. During the Korean War, he was recalled to active duty and served in a combat unit at the Chosin Reservoir from January through September 1951.

His service ribbons include –

- the American Theater Medal
- Asiatic Pacific Medal with four battle stars
- Presidential Unit Citation Medal with three awards
- Navy Commendation Medal with Combat V award
- Korean Defense Medal
- Korean Service Medal with one battle star
- International Service Medal
- United Nations Service Medal



He was also the recipient of New York State's highest military award, the Conspicuous Service Cross.

After his military service, Frank attended Syracuse University and completed the Dale Carnegie program.





***Kay Keller Maurer***

***Presenting with Steve Maurer on her Father Corporal Harold "Pie" Keller, USMC***





***Corporal Harold "Pie" Keller, USMC***



Harold Keller was born in Brooklyn, Iowa, on August 3, 1921, and except for his time in the service, he lived his entire life there. In high school he played football and earned the nickname “Pie” after eating too much pie before a game and becoming sick on the field in front of the crowd.



Keller enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and served with distinction during World War II. He became part of some of the most challenging and significant campaigns of the Pacific War. Keller saw action on Bougainville, Midway, Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima. He was also a member of Carlson’s Raiders, one of the Marine Corps’ most celebrated special operations units that carried out daring missions in the early years of the Pacific campaign.

### **Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima**

On February 23, 1945, during the Battle of Iwo Jima, Harold “Pie” Keller was one of the six Marines who raised the second, larger American flag atop Mount Suribachi. The moment was captured in Joe Rosenthal’s famous photograph, which quickly became one of the most iconic images of World War II and a symbol of courage and sacrifice.

For decades, the identities of the men in the photograph were misunderstood. The confusion stemmed from the chaos of battle, the fast-changing conditions on the island, and limited record keeping. For many years, Keller’s vital role went unrecognized, and other Marines, including Rene Gagnon, were mistakenly identified as flag raisers.

### **Correcting History**

It was not until October of 2019 that Harold “Pie” Keller was officially acknowledged by the United States Marine Corps as one of the six flag raisers in Rosenthal’s photograph. This correction came after detailed research and photographic analysis conducted by historians Brent Westemeyer and Steven Foley. Their findings were reviewed and confirmed by Marine

Corps historians and forensic experts. As a result, the Marine Corps publicly announced Keller's inclusion in the historic image, finally giving him the recognition he had long deserved.

### **Life After the War**

After the fighting ended, Keller attended officer candidate school, but the war concluded before he could be commissioned. Returning home to Brooklyn, Iowa, he resumed civilian life with the same quiet strength he had shown in combat. He worked for the Maytag Corporation for a short time, later joining the Brooklyn Creamery. When that business closed, he went on to work for the Surge milking equipment company.

Harold Keller was also active in his community, serving for a time as fire chief. Despite his significant role in one of the most famous moments of World War II, he never spoke about it. His family did not learn of his participation in the flag raising until many years after his death in 1979, when the Marine Corps corrected the historical record.

### **Honoring His Legacy**

In Brooklyn, Iowa, Keller is honored with a full-size bronze statue surrounded by four bronze plaques that tell the story of his life and service. This tribute stands as a lasting reminder of his bravery, humility, and the enduring legacy of the Marines who fought on Iwo Jima.

Harold "Pie" Keller embodied the quiet heroism of a generation that gave everything for their country yet asked for nothing in return. His story continues to inspire all who learn of his life and the truth behind one of America's most iconic wartime photographs.





***Jessamyn Harter***

***Presenting her Grandfather Sergeant Marty Connor, USMC***





***Sergeant Martin Connor, USMC***



Corporal Martin C. Connor was born and raised in Syracuse, New York. At 17 years old, still in high school, he nobly made the decision to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps in October 1943.

From Syracuse, Cpl. Connor traveled to South Carolina to complete his basic training at Parris Island, learning to become a rifleman. He then headed to Camp Pendleton, where he became skilled in the deployment of the 60mm light mortar and the 81mm medium mortar.

Cpl. Connor's battalion ultimately boarded the USS Deuel in Pearl Harbor, left Hawaii on January 27, 1945, and then landed on the western end of Iwo Jima. For more than a month, Cpl. Connor engaged in some of the fiercest fighting in World War II that consisted of artillery and mortar fire each day. Eventually, his battalion helped capture the island, and its airfields, from the Japanese Army. The Battle of Iwo Jima was a pivotal victory for the United States, though Cpl. Connor's battalion, alone, endured 989 casualties. For his valiant service, Cpl. Connor was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the American Theater Victory Medal.

After his honorable discharge in May 1946, Cpl. Connor returned home to Syracuse, earned his high school diploma, and graduated from Le Moyne College. He went on to own and operate an insurance company in downtown Syracuse for 65 years. Cpl. Connor is an avid tennis player, hunter and skier who served on the Ski Patrol at Labrador Mountain for more than 50 years. He and his wife, Janet Walsh Connor, raised seven wonderful children together.

Cpl. Connor returned to Iwo Jima in 1970, and on top of Mount Suribachi, he and other U.S. Marines met with some of the Japanese soldiers they once fought. Since then, Connor has helped return countless artifacts that were collected from Japanese bodies on Iwo Jima, including diaries, flags and photos. Cpl. Connor also has authored a manuscript about the battle and the courage and spirit of United States Marines.

Cpl. Connor has devoted himself to service. This outstanding veteran, and resident of Syracuse in the 50th Senate District, is an American patriot who has served his country with honor and distinction and made many contributions to our community.

**The following is written by Sergeant Connor's Granddaughter**

My incredible grandfather is my reason for loving the Marines, WWII history, Iwo Jima and my freedom. He fought on Iwo Jima for the full 36 days; he was 1st Battalion - 26th Regiment - 5th Marine Division; he landed on Red Beach 2, fought to the end of airstrip #1 southern tip up the west side. He is such an inspiration to me and one of the most amazing men I had the privilege of knowing & loving...to this day, one of the strongest men I've known & an incredible Marine. He is my hero.

Trying to eloquently put into words all that my Grandfather meant to me feels almost impossible, as he has always been such an important part of my life. If there was anything my Grandfather ever taught me by example, it was forgiveness, kindness, love and compassion.

My grandfather enlisted in the United States Marine Corps when he was just 17 and fought all 36 days on Iwo Jima. Surviving that devastating battle was a miracle. He saw the flag raised; he lost friends and USMC brothers. He experienced firsthand the brutality of war and hate.

My grandfather taught me by example to forgive; over the years, he worked to help return countless artifacts to Japanese families. These "souvenirs" (photos, flags, artifacts, etc.) were taken from the deceased bodies of the Japanese at Iwo and other battlefields. My grandfather's belief was that sending them back to Japan was a gesture of healing and release, both for grieving families and for graying Marines.

In 1970, My grandfather met a Buddhist monk at one of the anniversary trips he attended at Iwo Jima. They'd both traveled there for the 25th anniversary of the battle. The monk explained how Japanese families treasure any artifact of those who died on the island, artifacts that become part of the way those families pray for the lost. My grandfather thought about what the monk was asking. Like thousands of other Americans, he'd taken home battlefield "souvenirs," items he'd found in the possession of enemy dead. He sent the monk what he had: a Japanese diary, a pay book, some black and white photographs.

For the next 45 years, my grandfather quietly served as an intermediary. He returned photos, flags, and similar artifacts that American Marines and Soldiers had taken from Japanese bodies, at Iwo and other battlefields.

The Americans who fought on Iwo Jima in the end had greater numbers of men, material and technology superiority than the Japanese, but I believe that it was the raw courage, esprit de corps, and fighting spirit of the United States Marines that in the end won the day there.

Admiral Charles W. Nimitz once said, "Among the Americans who served on Iwo island, uncommon valor was a common virtue." I believe from my own experience there that what he said was absolutely true.

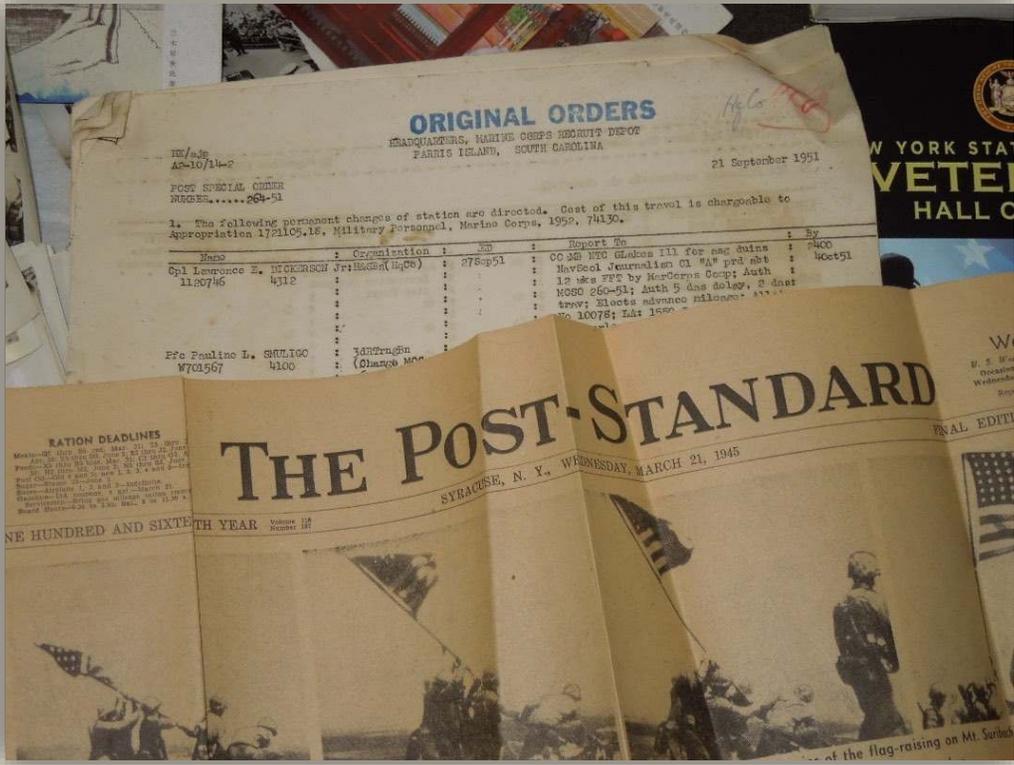
**Sgt. Marty Connor 1926-2020 USMC**





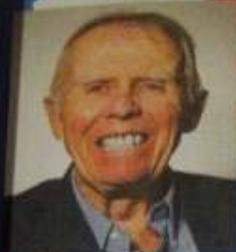






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## MARTIN C. CONNOR, JR.

Corporal Martin C. Connor was born and raised in Syracuse, New York. At 17 years old, still in high school, he nobly made the decision to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps in October 1943.

From Syracuse, Cpl. Connor traveled to South Carolina to complete his basic training at Parris Island, learning to become a rifleman. He then headed to Camp Pendleton, where he became skilled in the deployment of the 60mm light mortar and the 81mm medium mortar.

Cpl. Connor's battalion ultimately boarded the USS Deuel in Pearl Harbor, left Hawaii on January 27, 1945, and then landed on the western end of Iwo Jima. For more than a month, Cpl. Connor engaged in some of the fiercest fighting in World War II that consisted of artillery and mortar fire each day. Eventually, his battalion helped capture the island, and its airfields, from the Japanese Army. The Battle of Iwo Jima was a pivotal victory for the United States, though Cpl. Connor's battalion, alone, endured 989 casualties. For his valiant service, Cpl. Connor was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the American Theater Victory Medal.

After his honorable discharge in May 1946, Cpl. Connor returned home to Syracuse, earned his high school diploma, and graduated from Le Moyne College. He went on to own and operate an insurance company in downtown Syracuse for 65 years. Cpl. Connor is an avid tennis player, hunter and skier who served on the Ski Patrol at Labrador Mountain for more than 50 years. He and his wife, Janet Walsh Connor, raised seven wonderful children together.

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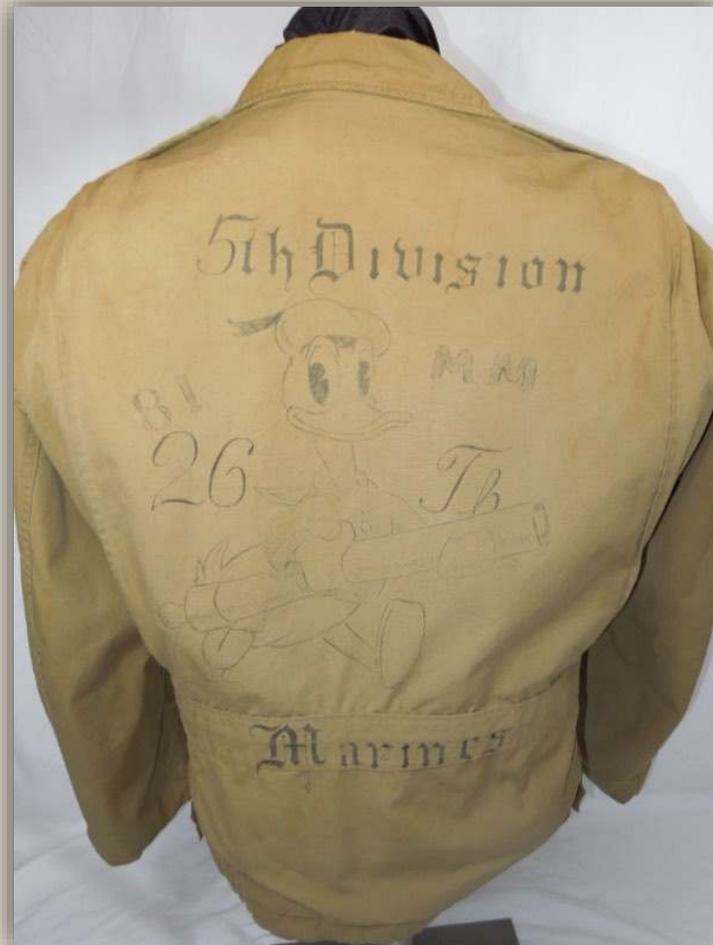
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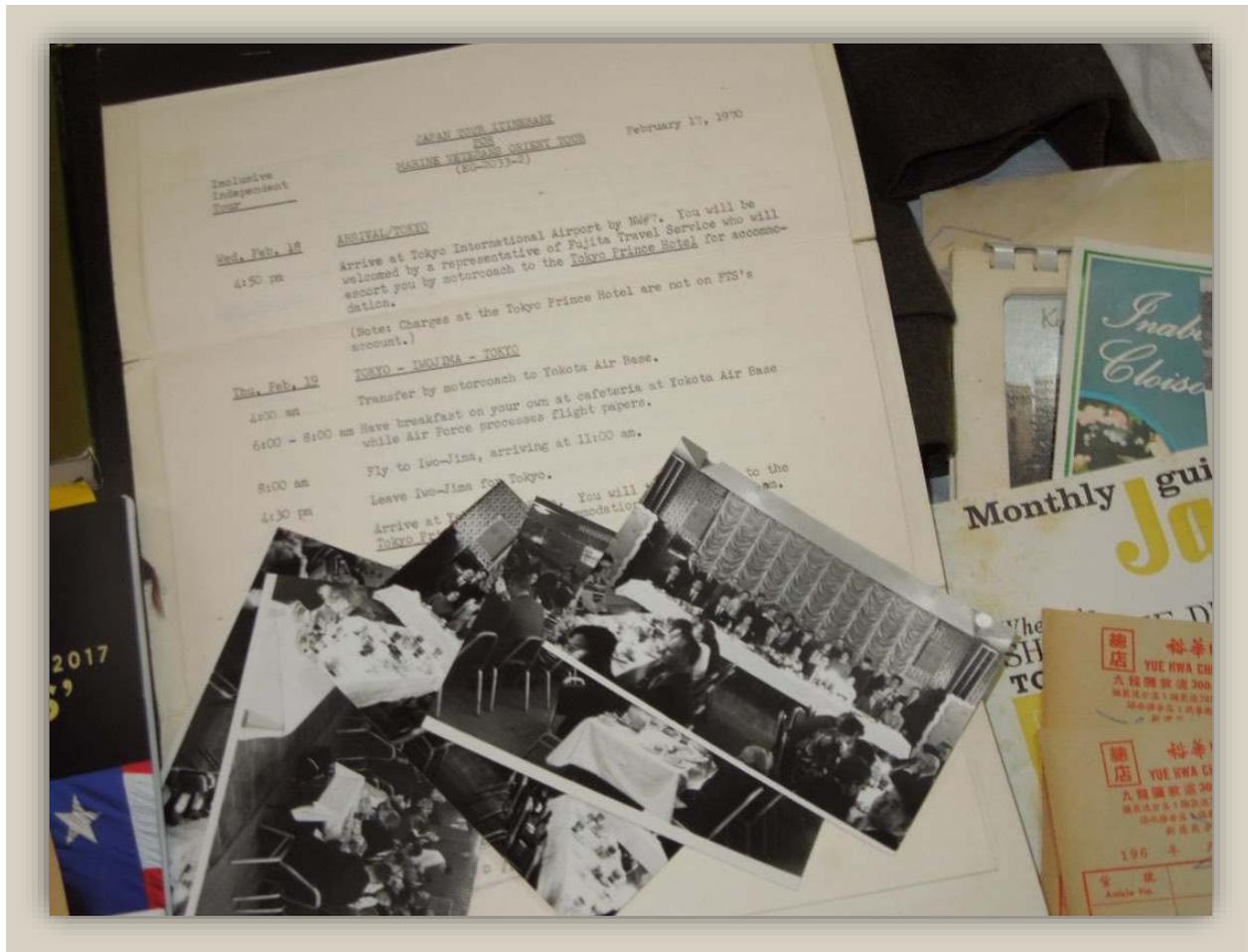


**MARTIN C. CONNOR, JR. IS NAMED TO THE NEW YORK STATE VETERANS' HALL OF FAME BY SENATOR JOHN A. DEFRANCISCO.**

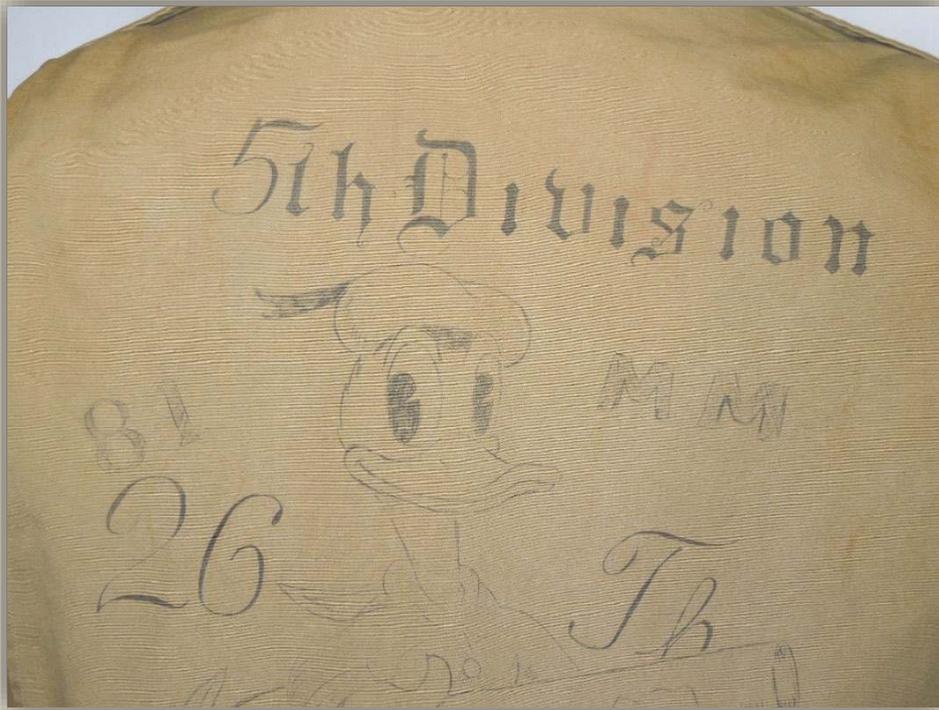


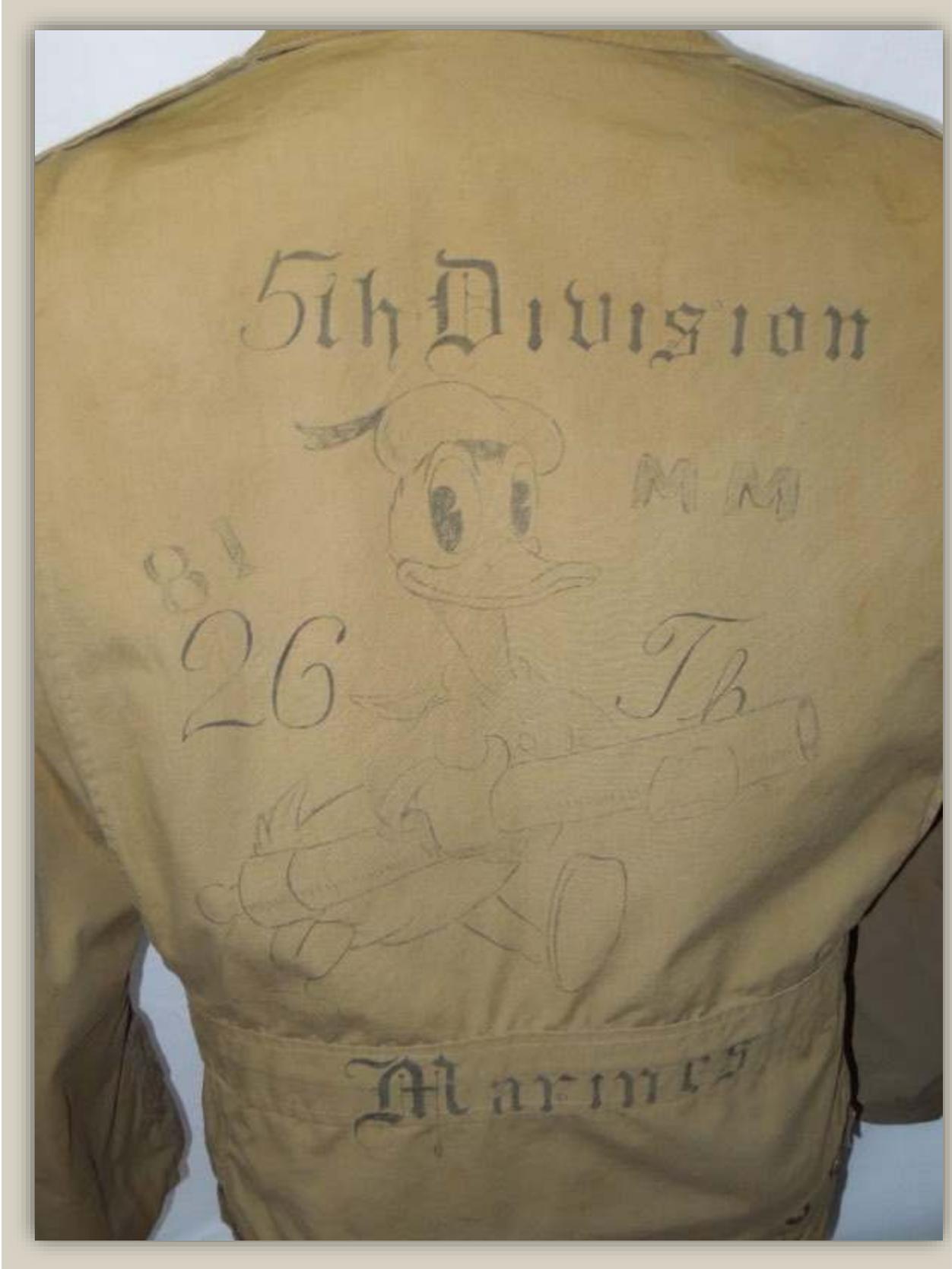




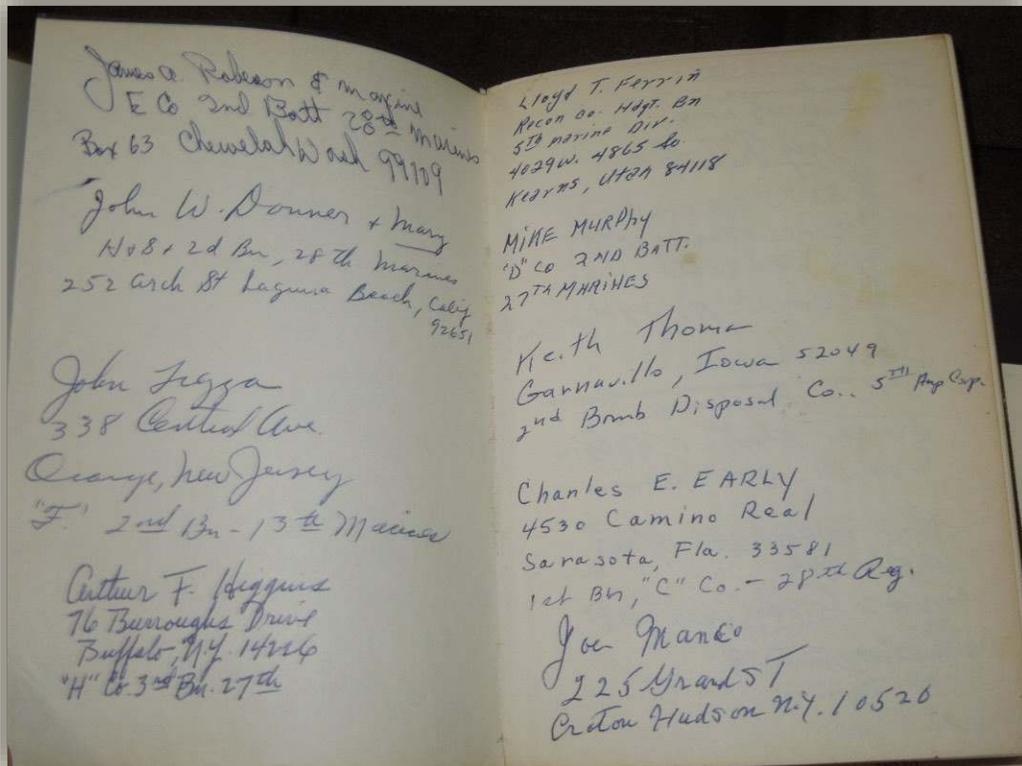
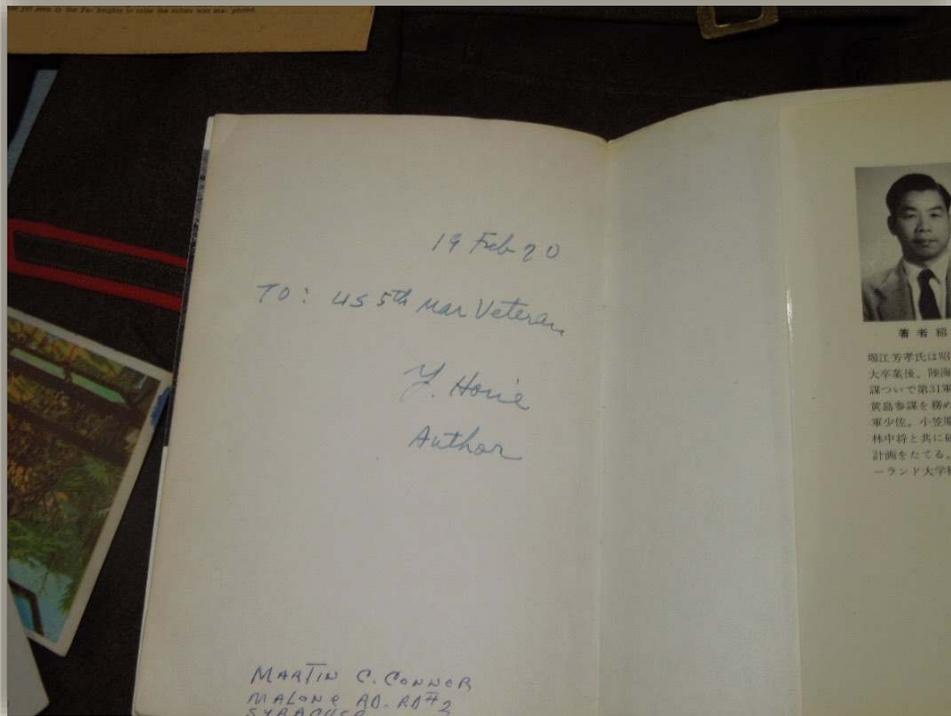












Martin Charles Connor, 94, passed away Friday at Crouse Community Center in Morrisville, N.Y. Marty was a lifelong resident of Syracuse and a member of the first graduating class of Le Moyne College. He was a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in the Pacific during World War II and surviving the Battle of Iwo Jima. He also was a drill sergeant on Parris Island during the Korean War. He owned the Martin C. Connor Insurance Agency and later was with Eastern Shores Insurance. He was a longtime member of SYAC and a National Ski Patrol member at Labrador Mountain Ski Area for over 52 years. Marty was an avid huntsman and participated in the Senior Olympics for racquetball and tennis. Marty started a project to return artifacts to the families of Japanese soldiers, and he was featured in several Syracuse newspaper stories related to his efforts. Marty was a communicant of St. Michael's Church; prior to that, he was a longtime member of Our Lady of Lourdes parish. Marty served in adoration duties up until last year.

He was predeceased by his parents, Martin and Edna Connor; his son, Brian Thomas Connor; grandson, Nathan C. Harter; brother, Joseph Connor of Syracuse; and sisters, Margaret Casey and Patricia Resch, both of Syracuse, and Mary Ellen Lozo of Florida.

He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Janet Walsh Connor; children, Shane Michael Connor of Gonzales, TX; Mary Lynn "Kelly" Harter and her husband, Christopher, of Madison, NY; Martin Charles Connor and his wife, Meisje (Johntz), of Melbourne, FL; Ellen (Kaiser) Baird (Brian's widow) of Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Terrence Gerard Connor and his husband, Gregory Mack Swalwell, of Dallas, TX; Daniel Walsh Connor and his wife, Sonia (Agosto Vazquez), of Milford, CT; and Colleen Marie Connor and her husband, Matthew E. Leno, of Marblehead, MA. Also, he was loved by many grandchildren, nieces and nephews.





**MY GRANDFATHER IN 1970 FOR 1ST REUNION (UNOFFICIAL)**



**STANDING IN THE SAME SPOT FOR THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY**



## ***Dean Laubach***

***Presenting his Great-Uncle Brigadier General Leland Swindler, USMC***





***Brigadier General Leland Swindler, USMC***



BGen Leland S. Swindler, USMC (Ret), 100, died on 29 October 1993 in Berlin, Maryland. A native of Indiana, BGen Swindler graduated from Whittier College, Whittier, California, in 1916, and had served with the California National Guard for five years before enlisting in the Marine Corps after graduation. He was commissioned in October 1917 and began a series of assignments in ships detachments.

In the interwar period following the end of World War I to 1944, he served at a number of stations at home and abroad, as well as at schools and at sea. One aspect of his interwar service that is extremely noteworthy to include is his time on the 4th Marines Officers Staff at Shanghai. It was during the 1937 prewar rise of hostilities when he truly cut his logistical teeth, as the 4th Marines oversaw the evacuation of American and European citizens from the Shanghai International Settlement.

During the course of this period, he was assigned to quartermaster and supply duties and, as a colonel, in February 1944 went to the Pacific, where he was assigned command of the 6th Base Depot.

### **Amphibious Logistical Support at Iwo Jima**

In the Iwo Jima operation, BGen Swindler served as the V Amphibious Corps shore party commander, for which he was awarded a Legion of Merit with Combat V.

The logistical effort required to sustain the seizure of Iwo Jima was enormous, complex, largely improvised on lessons learned in earlier Marine Corps operations in the Pacific, and highly successful. Clearly, no other element of the emerging art of amphibious warfare had improved so greatly by the winter of 1945. Marines may have had the heart and firepower to tackle a fortress-like Iwo Jima earlier in the war, but they would have been crippled in the doing of it by limitations in amphibious logistical support capabilities. These concepts, procedures, organizations, and special materials took years to develop, and once in place they fully enabled such large-scale conquests as Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

For the Iwo Jima operation, VAC had the 8th Field Depot, commanded by Colonel Leland S. Swindler. The depot was designed to serve as the nucleus of the shore party operation; the depot commander was dual hatted as the Shore Party Commander of the Landing Force, in which capacity he was responsible for coordinating the activities of the division shore parties. The timing of the logistics support at Iwo Jima proved to be well conceived and executed. Liaison teams from the 8th Field Depot accompanied the 4th and 5th Divisions ashore. On D+3, units of the field depot came ashore, and two days after this, when VAC assumed control on shore, the field depot took over and the unloading continued without interruption.

The V Amphibious Corps at Iwo Jima used every conceivable means of delivering combat cargo ashore when and where needed by the landing force. These means sequentially involved the prescribed loads and units of fire carried by the assault waves; hot cargo preloaded in on-call waves or floating dumps; experimental use of one-shot preloaded amphibious trailers and Wilson drums; general unloading; administrative unloading of what later generations of amphibians would call an assault follow-on echelon; and aerial delivery of critically short items, first by parachute, then by transports landing on the captured runways. In the process, the Navy-Marine Corps team successfully experimented with the use of armored bulldozers and sleds loaded with hinged Marston matting delivered in the assault waves to help clear wheeled

vehicles stuck in the soft volcanic sand. In spite of formidable early obstacles such as foul weather, heavy surf, dangerous undertows, and fearsome enemy fire, the system worked. Combat cargo flowed in; casualties and salvaged equipment flowed out.

Following the end of the war, BGen Swindler served at Camp Pendleton as post supply officer. He retired in July 1950 and was advanced to brigadier general on the retired list for having been decorated in combat. BGen Swindler was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery on 4 November.



**Marker is near Berlin, Maryland, in Worcester County. It is on South Point Road 0.1 miles south of Landing Street, on the left. Marker is at or near this postal address:  
11461 Newport Bay Dr, Berlin MD 21811**



***Mary Staffeld***  
***Presenting Corporal Don Graves, USMC***





***Corporal Don Graves, USMC***



In his 98 years, Don Graves has served his country as a combat Marine in World War II, as a minister to thousands during his career as a pastor, as a singer, and now as a motivational speaker talking about religion, war, patriotism, and love of country. Graves, who lives with his daughter in Texas, is a survivor of the Battle of Iwo Jima, the bloody South Pacific conflict that killed thousands of American and Japanese fighting men during World War II.

The battle began on February 19, 1945, when Marines landed on the southeastern beaches of the island. It ended March 26 with 6,821 Americans killed and nearly 20,000 wounded. Graves, at five feet six inches tall and weighing 145 pounds, carried a 72-pound flamethrower on his back and a .45 caliber pistol on his hip during the battle as a member of the 5th Marine Division, one of three divisions that assaulted Iwo Jima. Their orders were to secure the island and its three airfields. Looming above them was Mount Suribachi, the 554-foot volcanic mountain that would soon become part of an iconic photograph.

Graves' path to the foot of Mount Suribachi began after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Like most young men in America, Graves felt a duty to enlist. A resident of Detroit, Michigan, he joined the military at age seventeen along with his best friends John Loftus and Stanley Bacon. Graves became a Marine, Loftus joined the U.S. Navy, and Bacon enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force. With their families and their nation at risk, there was no time to finish school. "We wanted to save our families, our country. We all quit and joined up," Graves said. "No. 1, we were patriots. It was drilled into us." They called themselves the "Three Musketeers."

On board a transport ship, Graves and his fellow Marines did not know their destination was Iwo Jima until a day before the landing. He and the other members of Platoon 675 stormed Green Beach, the closest to Mount Suribachi, one of roughly fifteen landing zones all designated by a color. Graves said that, like many people who grew up during the Depression, he was not a churchgoer, but he reached out to God for help on the sands of Iwo Jima as artillery shells pounded landing craft in the water behind him. "I prayed for the first time," he said. "He got me off that beach."

Graves was nearby four days after landing when Marines scaled Mount Suribachi to raise the American flag. The iconic photo taken by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal was actually of the second flag raised that day, and it became a symbol of patriotism, the grit of the U.S. Marines, and the toll of victory for generations to come. Some of the six Marines in that photograph were sent home to help promote war bonds, and Graves was a good friend of Ira Hayes, the Native American Marine among that group who became the subject of the 2006 Clint Eastwood film *Flags of Our Fathers*.

Graves witnessed savagery and death, including that of a young replacement in his foxhole who was fatally shot by a sniper at an observation spot where Graves had been just minutes earlier. The Marine fell backward at Graves' feet, causing him to hit the ground crying and then laughing. He said he cursed God, the Marine Corps, and the Japanese because of the young Marine's death until another Marine helped him compose himself. Later, Graves said he felt badly that he had cursed God because he believed divine intervention helped him survive the battle.

When he and his unit assembled to leave Iwo Jima, only eighteen of the 335 men who had hit the beach with him were left. At their officer's suggestion, they visited the island's cemetery to pay their respects to their fallen comrades. Both of his friends—Loftus and Bacon—also survived the war.

Graves' call to the ministry came nine years after the war when he attended a Billy Graham rally. He went on to serve as a minister for 32 years with his wife, Rebecca, by his side. He left the last of his five churches at age 82 in Arizona. Rebecca died in May after a long battle with dementia. They had been married for 70 years.

Graves' calling as a public speaker began in 2010 when he met Laura Leppert, wife of then-Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert. She had formed a new patriotic organization, the Daughters of World War II, and Graves responded to her media request for Iwo Jima survivors to attend an event in Dallas commemorating the invasion. The experience inspired him to talk about the battle—something he had rarely done since the war. At one event, he sang the national anthem, having always been known for his singing voice.

In 2013, Graves accompanied Leppert and a group of fellow Iwo Jima survivors back to the island. "We had a great time," Graves said. "I was disappointed in the island. I have pictures of it. It's covered with green and you can't see anything."

Since then, the Iwo Jima veteran has spoken about faith, war, and love of country to numerous civic organizations such as Rotary Clubs and Lions Clubs. He speaks to businesses such as Caterpillar, Phillips 66, and Bloomfield Homes. He has spoken to school history classes and veterans' groups across the country. He has sung the national anthem at veterans' events and several times at Texas Rangers baseball games and the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo.

Graves is also active in a veterans' group called Roll Call, which hosts a free monthly veterans' luncheon at Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth. Roll Call has more than 1,600 members, including about 20 from World War II, who served in various military branches from the 1940s through recent actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In May, after his 100th birthday, Don went to Nashville and signed a recording contract for the song "The Sand of Iwo Jima". It was written for him by songwriters Jason Sever and Frank Myers and was recorded by Lee Greenwood and John Rich. The song tells the story of Don's time on Iwo Jima. <https://www.pbs.org/national-memorial-day-concert/>



**A portrayal of Don's story**



***Hans Andersen***

*Will present his Grandfather-in-law Lt. Col Arthur "J" Berk, USMCR*





***Lieutenant Colonel Arthur J. Berk, USMCR***

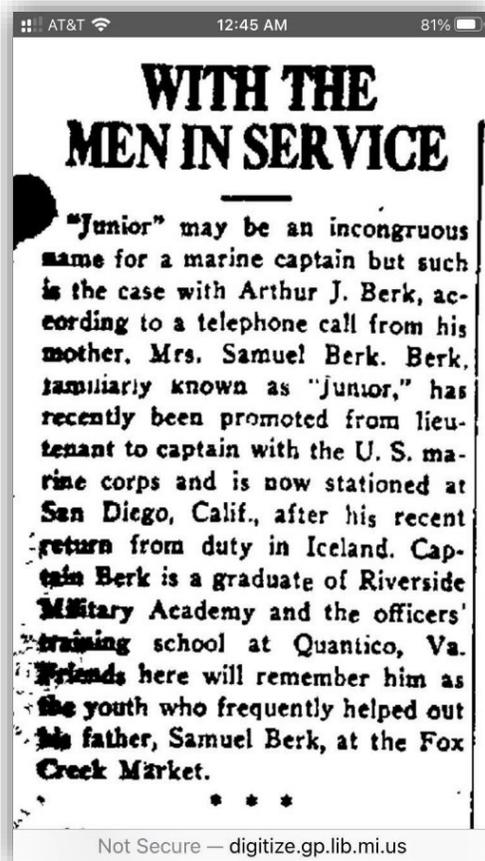


Arthur "J" Berk was born on December 25, 1919, and served with the United States Marine Corps Reserve, eventually retiring with the rank of Colonel, though he always regarded himself as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was among the Marines assigned to the Iceland Garrison, service for which he earned the American Defense Medal with Star and Base Clasp. Following Pearl Harbor, he continued to serve in Iceland, earning the European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal before returning to the United States.

At Camp Pendleton, he played a role in forming the 4th Marine Tank Battalion, earning the American Theater Campaign Medal. During World War II, he served with the 4th Marine Division in the Marianas and at Iwo Jima, earning the Asia Pacific Medal with two Stars. He was cited for meritorious service at Iwo Jima, receiving the Bronze Star Medal, and shared in the Presidential Unit Citation with Bronze Star awarded to the 4th Marine Division for its actions on Saipan and Tinian.

His service was further recognized with the World War II Victory Medal and the Organized Marine Corps Reserve Medal. Arthur Berk passed away on June 29, 2000.



Gross Pointe Register, Grosse Point Park, Michigan, Sept 10, 1942

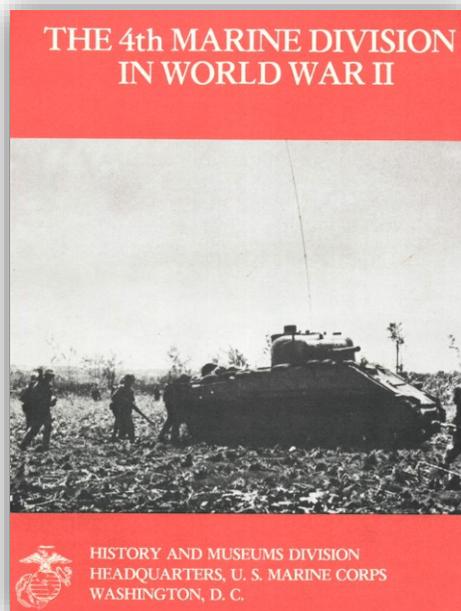
Arthur, in his new rank of Captain, was the original commanding officer of Company B, 4<sup>th</sup> Tanks, 24<sup>th</sup> Marines. This would make him a peer of Robert Naiman, whose superb memoir "Tanks on the Beaches" recalls Naiman's time as CO of Company A.

**CAMP PENNLETON.-** With the arrival of a fleet of new Gen Stewart tanks, officers announce that field training of Company B, 4th Tanks, 24th Marines, will start immediately in the hills here. Capt. Arthur J. Berk, has been named commanding officer of the new unit. Tankmen last week were servicing the tanks preparatory to the rigorous training schedule.

**Headline "New Gen. Stewart Tanks Put In Use"  
Marine Corps Chevron, 8 May 1943**

By the time of Saipan and Tinian, Arthur has been promoted to Major, and is listed as the "Bn-4" officer for 4<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion. The link to 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division in World War II is as follows -

<https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/The%204th%20Marine%20Division%20in%20World%20War%20II%20%20PCN%2019000412800.pdf>



Prior to Operation Detachment (Iwo Jima), Arthur is part of MajGen Harry Schmidt's V Amphibious Corps Headquarters

Ser. 0044B  
049/106

HEADQUARTERS, V AMPHIBIOUS CORPS,  
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO.

10 January, 1945.

From: The Commanding General.  
To: The Director of Personnel, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps.

Subject: Embarkation Roster.

Reference: (a) Article 10-15(1), MCM.

1. The below-named officers and enlisted personnel of this Headquarters embarked aboard the U.S.S. AUBURN (AGC-10) at [REDACTED] on 11 January, 1945 and sailed therefrom on 12-11 January, 1945.

MajGen. SCHMIDT, Harry, USMC	0865
Col. BROWN, William F., USMC	0120
Col. CRAIG, Edward A., USMC	0196
Col. JONES, Blythe G., USMC	0484
Col. LETCHER, John S., USMC	04282
Capt. O'NEILL, John B., (MC), USN	39849
Col. ROGERS, William W., USMC	0841
Col. ROTHGEB, Clarence E., USA	O-15612
Col. STAFFORD, David A., USMC	0936
Col. SWINDLER, Leland S., USMC	0970
Col. YANCEY, Thomas R., (GSC), USA	O-360729
LtCol. CARTER, John J., USMCR	04611
LtCol. FORRESTER, Thomas F., USMCR	05513
LtCol. KELLY, Sidney M., USMC	05628
LtCol. LYTZ, Walter R., USMCR	05738
LtCol. PREVITT, Ben F., (NA), USMC	05300
LtCol. REVANE, Henry J., USMC	06202
LtCol. SCHMITZ, Harry A., USMC	05136
LtCol. SHINE, Frank, USMC	05421
LtCol. STEWART, Joseph L., USMC	05644
LtCol. STILLWELL, Rex R., USMC	07100
LtCol. VADNAIS, Harry W. G., USMC	04999
LtCol. WELLER, Donald M., USMC	04550
Maj. BECKENSTRATER, Joseph W., USMCR	07379
Maj. BERK, Arthur "J", USMCR	06864
Maj. CLAUSET, William L., Jr., USMCR	06703
Maj. FULLER, Regan, USMCR	06982
Maj. JUDGE, William C., USMCR	05034
Maj. LAWRENCE, Henry G., Jr., USMCR	05963
Maj. NIEDERLUECKE, Walter C., (GSC), USA	O-227906
Maj. POLIVKA, Douglas M., USMCR	06266
Maj. RITZAU, Erik W., USMCR	06358
Maj. van der VOORT, Joseph N., Jr., USMCR	07869
Maj. WATERS, Edward, USMCR	06247
Maj. WATTS, Tom R., USMC	06225

SECTION

**MARINE MAJOR ARTHUR J. BERK**, son of Mr. and Mrs. S. Berk of 13040 Chandler Park drive, was recently presented with a letter of recommendation from the Commanding General of the 5th Amphibious Corps for meritorious service at Iwo Jima, where he served on the staff of the Corps.



**Maj. A. J. Berk** Major Berk's father is the owner of Fox Creek Market. His wife lives in San Antonio, Tex. Although he had enough points to get a discharge from the Marines, Major Berk chose to remain in until the war war ended.

Official Marine Corps Photo.

(Detroit Free Press, date unknown, but post-Iwo and pre-V-J-day)

Marines at Iwo Jima who had served since before Pearl Harbor were sometimes given additional commendations to raise their points score above the threshold for discharge. Arthur's Bronze Star was part of that effort and brought him just over the discharge line after the battle.

However, he chose to remain in the war. His proudest moment, and the only one he ever spoke of with family, was the honor of attending the formal surrender of the Nagasaki garrison at the end of the war.

Post-War, Arthur was involved in setting up the first postwar Organized (ground) Reserve.

*Postwar Battalion Commanding Officers*

Of the 9 battalion commanding officers selected to head the first postwar Organized (ground) Reserve, Lieutenant Colonels Charles H. Cox (Philadelphia) and Walter A. Churchill (Toledo) were eventually selected for flag rank in the Reserve and today are on the Reserve retired list as one- and two-star generals, respectively, and Lieutenant Colonel Robert N. Fricke (Richmond) was advanced to brigadier general on retirement. Others were Lieutenant Colonel Lewis N. Samuelson (New York); Lieutenant Colonel Alfred V. Jorgensen (Los Angeles); Major Arthur "J" Berk (St. Louis); Major Robert L. Holderness (Seattle); Major Nick E. Presecan (Indianapolis); and Major Henry G. Totzke (Detroit).

Those who received this ribbon and medal have the distinction of being members of a most exclusive group since this is probably the decoration least known to the public and worn, even today, by a relative handful of hard-core reservists. Ground officers receiving the medals included the following who were either selected for flag rank or promoted to general officer rank on retirement because of decorations received in combat: Colonel Joseph R. Knowlan, Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lessing, and Colonel Melvin L. Krulewitch.

Others in this rare breed included Colonel Harold M. Keller, Colonel Bernard S. Barron, former Major George W. Bettex, Colonel Harvey L. Miller, Colonel Edward P. Simmonds, Colonel Iven C. Stickney, Colonel Alfred A. Watters, Colonel Clarence H. Baldwin, Colonel John J.

(Excerpted from "The Marine Corps Reserve - A History" by Reserve Officers of Public Affairs Unit 4-1, Division of Reserve, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, published in 1966)

My wife Angyl – Arthur's granddaughter - said that Arthur spoke of being on Iwo, but like so many veterans he never talked about details.

Arthur only spoke of Iwo indirectly of Iwo through a wargame he would play at the dinner table in the 1980s. He would push peas and potatoes around on his dinner plate to make a distinctive island shape, and then ask his granddaughter "How would you attack this?" and "If you go here, the enemy goes there", and "How would your plan change if you had Shermans with flamethrowers on them?"

It wasn't until two decades later, after Arthur's death, that Angyl saw me reading a book about Iwo Jima, including a map, and realized that map was the exact scenario that she played at the dinner table over and over again in her childhood.

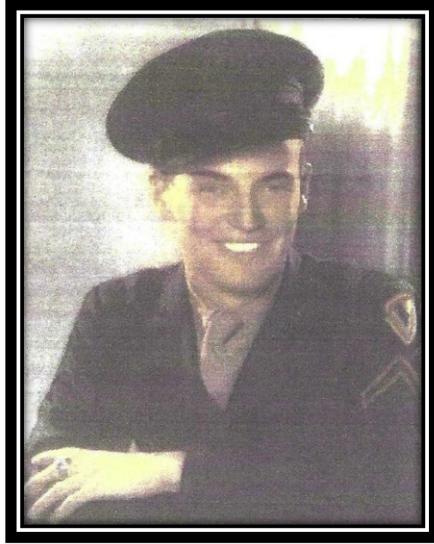
Based on family stories, I suspect he may have fought alongside black Marines in "rear" areas of the island (such as they were) when they were attacked by Japanese infiltration & raiding parties. He was a deeply prejudiced man in a way that was common at the time, but he also spoke that when someone fights right alongside you and saves your life, they have your respect no matter their skin color.



***Cindy Blackburn***

***Alfredo Cooke will present her Father Joseph Blackburn***





***Private First Class Joseph Blackburn, USMC***



May 8, 2025

Dear Ms. Butler:

I am writing you in reference to the latest Spearhead News and wanted to share with you some information about my father's experience on Iwo Jima and also, Sasebo, Japan (where he and many other young Marines were sent after the Japanese surrender on September 22, 1945.) You will note that I have enclosed copies of two submissions I had previously contributed to the Spearhead News (Spring/Summer edition 2019) concerning my late father, Joseph Blackburn. He was barely out of his teens when he stepped upon the shores of Iwo Jima in 1945 (Engineering Battalion, Fifth Division Marine, Spearhead, Red Beach.) Also, there is a copy of a photo taken just recently of a rice painting he received while serving in Sasebo, Japan (I will relate about that later in this letter.)

Firstly in response to the article, Masterpiece, "A Story About Joe Rosenthal," and my father's exceptional bit of history with that iconic photo I wish to retell. My father first saw and actually held the original photo on Iwo Jima when a fellow Marine and friend who worked in the photo lab handed it to him. As my father explained it, his friend said, "Hey Blackie, what do you think about this photo?" To which my father replied, "Wow! This reminds me of the painting, "Washington Crossing The Delaware!" True story and wanted to share it with you.

When my father, along with many fellow Marines, arrived in Sasebo, Japan, they were all struck by the fact that there seemed to be no Japanese civilians to be seen. Of course, that population was warned by their false media that the triumphal Marines would cruelly slaughter any and all civilians. No wonder they couldn't be seen. Then came a day, when a young Marine was driving a bulldozer making a road, when a wayward street urchin, a small child ran in front of the immense machine. Terrified, the young Marine slammed on the brakes ceasing the movement of the road builder, leaped from the vehicle, lifted the small child, placed him safely on the side of the road, patted his small head and gave him some candy. After that, my father would tell me, Japanese civilians began to emerge. No longer believers in the falsehoods they were once told.

The rice painting (which is a depiction of Japanese Heaven) was part of another true story my father blessed me with his telling. My father was assigned to a Japanese colonel (I believe that was the rank of this Japanese serviceman) who brought my father to places where the Japanese army had stores of wares and equipment associated with the war. My father, who was an artist from an early age, nearly always carried his faithful companions, a sketch pad and pencils. Although unable to speak each other's language, somehow my father made it known to the colonel that he would like to sketch

his portrait. The colonel sat down stiffly, as in attention, and my father sketched his likeness. He then handed it to the colonel. A day later, my father in his residence was called by a fellow Marine. "Hey Blackie! You have a friend here who wants to see you!" To my father's utter amazement, it was the colonel himself, flanked by what my father felt must be two of his servants. It was then that the colonel presented my father with two pearls, a bottle of Saki, and a rice painting complete with tassels and two marble balls which hung as weights on the rice painting. It was the colonel's grateful and thankful acknowledgment of my father's sketched portrait. Well! The Saki was consumed quickly by fellow Marines as my father didn't drink, the two pearls were later given to his two sisters, and the rice painting of Japanese Heaven hung in my grandparents' home for years until I received it. It was without the marble balls then, and the tassels greatly diminished but I had it hanging in my dorm room at college until much later when I had it framed under glass. It now hangs in my daughter's home (Sagamore Beach, Massachusetts) a testament to a healing World War II friendship and my father's part in that connection.

Thank you for your kind attention. If you have any other questions, I would be delighted to hear from you. Best of luck keeping Spearhead News alive and the incredible contribution of the Fifth Division Marine Association.

All my best,

Cynthia Robotham

Daughter of the late Joseph Blackburn (Iwo Jima Marine)

## A goodbye kiss

My beloved late father, Joseph Blackburn, was a young Marine who fought on Iwo Jima. I have [included below] the cover of the first edition of the *Spearhead* where my father scrawled: "Look at the last page of me and Lois kissing good by." I also [included] the photo but would love to have a copy of this first edition as I only have pieces of it.

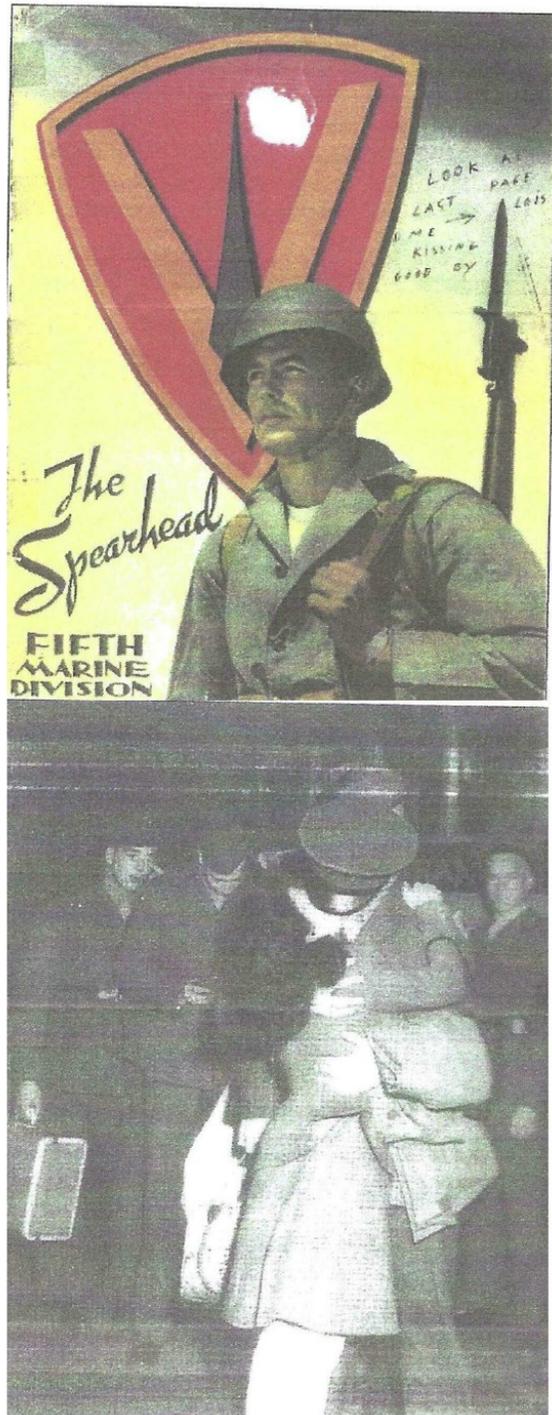
By the way, Lois wrote my father a "Dear John" letter while he was overseas, and he met and married my mother in 1947 *after* the war. My parents had a long and devoted marriage, and my mother and I had the privilege of being by my father's side when he passed from this life onto the next in April of 2012. He was buried in his Marine Corps uniform (the reason he signed up for the Marines), but never wore or owned the uniform until several months before his death.

My father was a green kid from Berlin, Conn., who was only 17 when he signed up for war, and he shared many stories of his wartime experience.

He also loved to draw and decorated hundreds of envelopes he sent home to family and friends. His late sister saved many of them, and I donated them to the D-Day Museum in New Orleans, along with a piece of a Zero airplane that my father took home as a souvenir from Iwo Jima.

My father would later go to the Randall School of Art in Connecticut on the GI Bill and was a commercial artist. He is buried, as he wished, in the National Cemetery in Bourne, Mass.

— Cynthia Blackburn Robotham  
Hyannis, Mass.



# Letters from home

## One young Marine's creative expressions of military life during WWII

By Cynthia Blackburn Robotham

My father, Joseph Blackburn, was not only a devoted husband and father, he was very creative, and brought that creativity to his career. He graduated from the Randall School of Art in Connecticut on the GI Bill after the war and worked for several advertising agencies before later becoming the art director at General Electric in Plainville, Conn.

He was also an artist working in oils and produced many paintings throughout his lifetime. In fact, he painted a stilllife of some of his Marine paraphernalia, and of battle scenes on Iwo Jima. Those paintings he donated to the National Cemetery in Bourne, Mass., where in accordance with my father's wishes, he now lies with others of his military kin.

However, when my father enlisted in the Marines at the tender age of 17, along with his willingness to serve his country, he brought along his colored pencils as he loved to draw from an early age. My father adored receiving mail, and although he received letters from family, friends and a host of lady friends, it was his older sister, Muriel, who was the most steadfast and dedicated letter writer.

My father's letters home began to carry an extra little embellishment, beginning in boot camp and throughout his entire military service. Cartoons depicting his military adventures were often amusing, others wistful as he longed for home, his sustained interest in the opposite sex and depictions of foreign places (China and Japan.) He also created cards for other servicemen for their families and sweethearts, including a cook who asked my father to produce a Valentine card for his girlfriend. The girlfriend was so thrilled with her boyfriend's romantic gesture that

according to my father he ate better than the officers after that!

An article was written in 1945 that appeared in the New Britain Herald about the amusement of postal works in my father's hometown of Berlin, Conn., where his mail was often delayed in being delivered as everyone wanted to see his envelopes at the local post office.

My father also sketched extensively as well, of the buildings or other comrades, and was enlisted to paint murals on the officer's mess hall walls at Camp Tarawa in Hawaii.

The only time my father had to forego his artistry was on Iwo Jima, where the only mail being sent from the battlefield happened twice and on a tiny piece of paper called V-mail.

When stationed in Tientsin, China, my father was talked into attending a party for a ballet company hosted by the Russian military by his buddy whose grandparents were Russian, and he spoke fluent Russian. American servicemen had been forbidden to go into the Russian area as several American servicemen had been killed as conflicts had erupted between the two then-allies, but nonetheless my father gullibly was "sucked in."

When they arrived, his buddy quickly began to communicate with the Russian party goers, and just as quickly began to flagrantly flirt with one of the prima ballerinas whom my father was quite certain was romantically involved with one of the Russian brass. "I'm dead," my father thought, and he crept into a corner of the room, hoping to seek escape when a tiny little ballerina in a tutu approached him and began to chatter to him in Russian. Unable to understand the child, my father brought out his pad and pencils and quickly drew a picture of Mickey



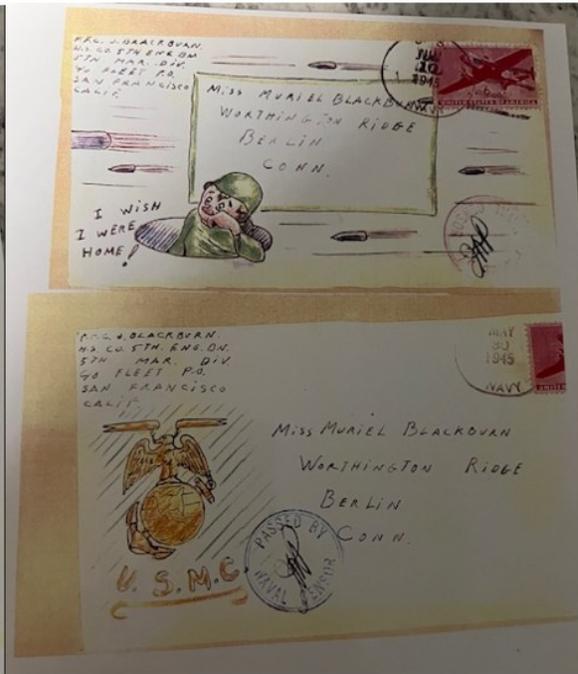
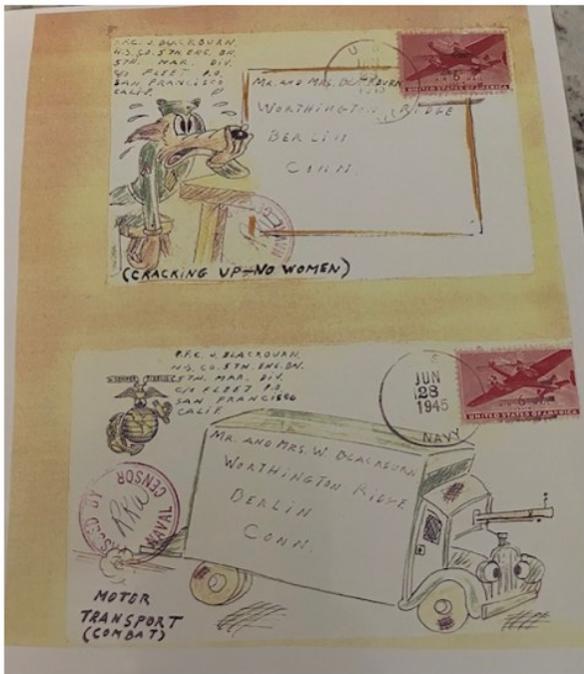
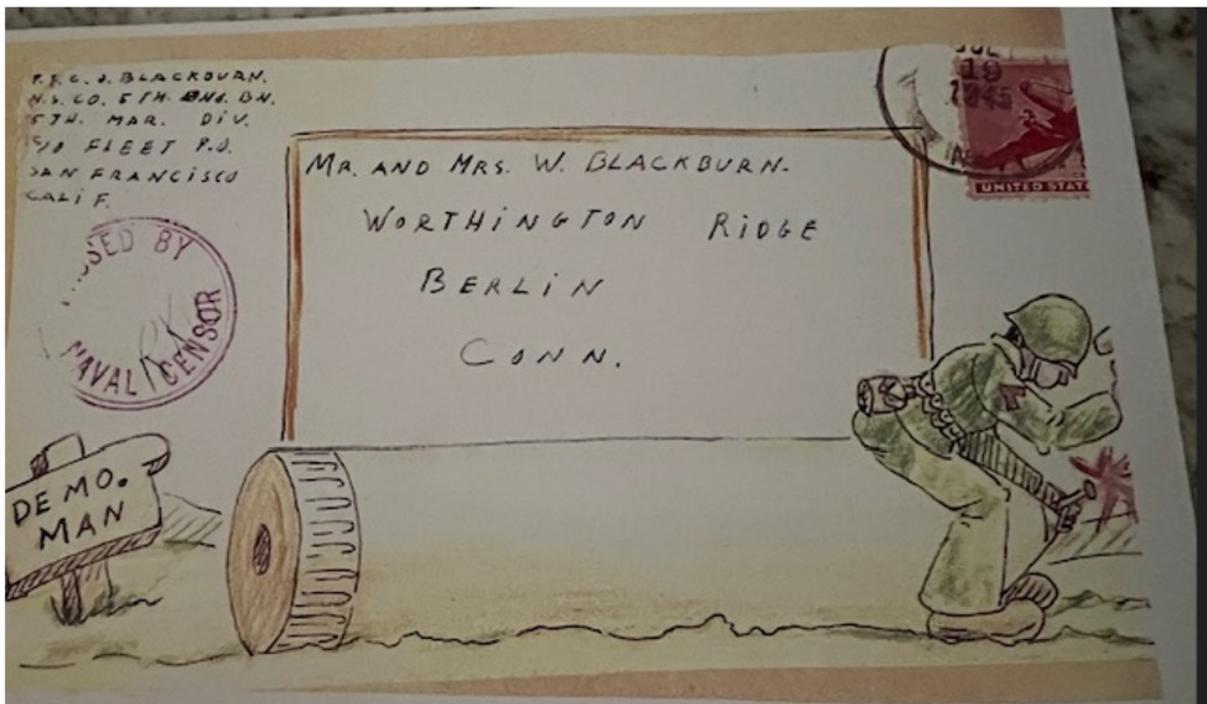
Joseph Blackburn, 5th ENGR

Mouse and handed it to the child.

Suddenly the diminutive little ballerina screeched out, "Mickey! Mickey!"—which sent a flurry of other little ballerinas running over to my father. For the rest of the evening, my father drew every Disney character he could think of, and later stated, "I think that saved my skin that night!"

Many of my father's envelopes were carefully preserved by his sister, Muriel, and many years later, after her death, my cousin Susan gave me the entire collection. I would later donate them for antiquity to the D-Day Museum in New Orleans, La., where they were on exhibit for a couple of years but are now archived along with many other military donations.







**Photo taken on IWO JIMA. My father is wearing goggles (machine gunner) top run end.**



**Me honoring my father at the nursing home shortly before his death in 2012. The only time he got to wear the Marine Corps uniform (which I had him buried in.)**



Back cover of The Spearhead (original) which he sent home to his parents pointing out it was he who was captured on camera kissing his girlfriend at the time, Lois, goodbye on the back page.



Front of the Spearhead



Japanese rifle my father brought home from WWII

**My father experienced a profound spiritual experience when on Iwo Jima.**

He told me those first days and nights hunkered down in a fox hole he dug, and next to a poor young dead Marine whose head was exposing his brain.

My father recalled he would have to look at it for several days.

My father was truly terrified, and was advised by a seasoned sergeant to watch out for flares, as if they hit you, they could burn you terrible. Napalm. So, to keep away from them if they came close to your fox hole.

My father told me he kept praying the Lord's Prayer over and over as he told me, "If I got blown to bits, I wanted the Lord's name to be on my lips."

He was praying hard during the night, and he became aware of a bright light.

Fearful it was a flare descending on him, he opened his eyes to witness a figure all enveloped in light, standing over his fox hole and looking upon him benevolently. Astonished, and most surely overwhelmed, he closed his eyes and when he opened them again, the figure was gone.

My father felt sure he was guarded over the entire time he served on Iwo Jima.

Just thought I would share!

All my best,  
Cindy



**Japanese Heaven given to my father by  
a Japanese colonel**



***Mary Ellen Hanthorn Stan***

***Alfredo Cooke presenting her Father First Lieutenant Jack E. Hanthorn, USMC***





***First Lieutenant Jack E. Hanthorn, USMC***



## *A Daughter's Tribute and Appreciation*

In 2010, in honor of what would have been my dad's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, it became my mission to learn about and document my father's 30 year Marine Corps career. At that time I had no idea what I would learn. Most of my memories were of Daddy's legal career at JAG and not of his "gun-totin" years, as I call them.

I dove into my research referring to family scrapbooks articles, photos, military books, copies of his personnel file from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, and military history television shows and DVDs. What I learned shocked me and moved me tears – "My daddy lived through THAT?!?" But none of his service affected me more than what he and his fellow Marines experienced at Iwo Jima.

Long before he became "Colonel Daddy," he was First Lieutenant Jack E. Hanthorn, Mortar Platoon Leader. It was September 1943, and he had only two things left to do before heading for practice maneuvers in southern California and then off to the Pacific Theater. He obtained permission to go on leave to say good-bye to his parents in Birmingham and then to St. Louis to propose to his childhood sweetheart, Audrey. She said **"yes!"**

In November, 1944, following some "practice" battles at Roi, Saipan, and Tinian, he participated in Amphibious exercises aboard the USS HENDRY in the vicinity of Maalaea Bay, Maui, HI.

In January, 1945 he participated in additional landing exercises aboard the USS NEWBERRY in Pearl Harbor, Oahu and Maalaea Bay, Maui. Aboard the USS NEWBERRY he set sail from Pearl Harbor, Oahu on 01-27-1945 for Saipan, Marianas Islands, arriving there on 01-11-1945. On 02-15-1945, aboard **LST-642**, he sailed from Saipan arriving at Iwo Jima on 02-19-1945. During World War II, **LST-642** was assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific theater and participated in the assault and occupation of Iwo Jima in February and March 1945. **LST-642** earned one battle star for World War II service. Daddy did mention that there were some nauseous moments on LST-642.



**LST-642 at anchor off Iwo Jima (Mt Surabachi in the background) with other ships of the invasion**

He participated in the initial beach landing on Beach Yellow 1 and served in the battle until 03-16-1945. He embarked aboard the USS KINGSBURY and sailed for Kahului, Maui, arriving there on 04-04-1945.



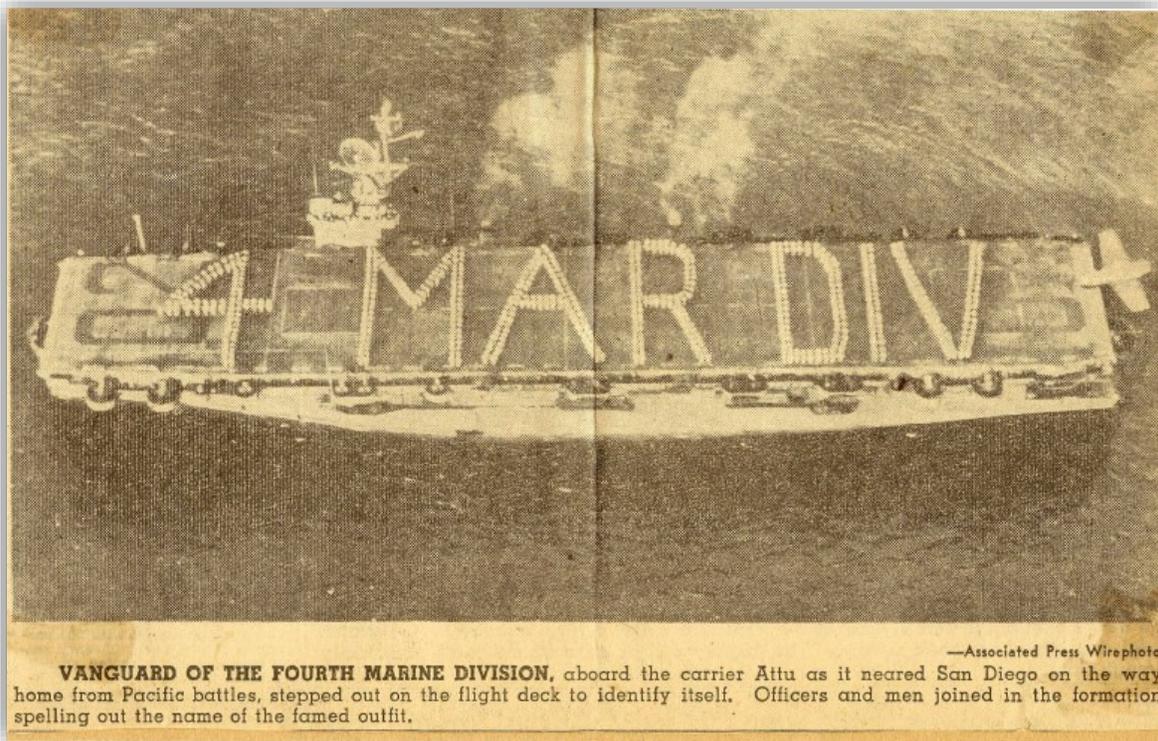
Like so many other marines, Daddy never talked about specific details and events. Oh, there was mention of the nausea experienced on the ride in to the beach on the LST, and the difficulty in trudging up the beach in that damnable black volcanic sand. But, in his estimation, his service was no more special or heroic than those of his fellow Marines. But there was one story he told which had to have affected him greatly. During the battle, he and two of his men were positioned in a fox hole. A mighty blast occurred next to them, killing the one man on his right and blowing off the arm of the man on his left. Daddy was untouched except for the grief he must have felt in his heart.

While we may not know of other details from him, we can read from his commendations what his participation was.

*“On 19 February, 1945, on IWO JIMA, First Lieutenant HANTHORN, in command of his unit, landed with an assault battalion. Although the beaches provided little cover from devastating mortar and artillery fire, he led his platoon to a position in close proximity to the front lines, placed his mortars in action, and delivered accurate fire on enemy personnel and emplacements. His efforts were highly instrumental in assisting the continued advance of the battalion.” – Citation memo for the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with "V" from **Lt Gen Roy S. Geiger**.*

*“First Lieutenant HANTHORN was of immeasurable aid to his battalion in directing effective mortar fire on enemy positions. He skillfully coordinated his platoon fire with the artillery and naval gunfire support. On one occasion, he registered his platoon on an avenue of approach to our positions which he deemed particularly dangerous. Three hundred of the enemy who attempted a night infiltration through his area were routed by the fire that he called down on them.” - Commendation Certificate from **Maj Gen C. B. Cates** for his specific actions on Iwo Jima.*

On 10-25-1945 he embarked aboard the USS RUDYERD BAY and sailed for San Diego, CA. When the “4<sup>th</sup>” came home, they sailed into San Diego in style on 10-31-1945.



**On 11-28-1945 Dad sent a telegram saying he was coming home.  
And ..... on 01-12-1946, Jack and Audrey married.**





USMC Reunion, Norfolk, VA June 1994

**He got the girl, and she kept him - even after  
WWII, Korea, and Vietnam!**



***For you Dad!***



**Posing with next door neighbor (banner installer), Josh Sportiello, USMC (2015-2019)  
Golf Co. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division.  
Currently with LAPD (Thank you! Be Safe Out There!)**



Veterans banner with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Div sticker

**In appreciation for all those Marines who fought for us, whenever I think life is just too tough (Polio Survivor, Camp Lejeune 1955) I stop and recite**

**“Iwo Jima, Iwo Jima, Iwo Jima .....”**

**Enough said!**



## **Tom Huffines**

*Alfredo Cooke presenting his Father Private First Class John Franklin Huffhines, USMC*





***Private First Class John Franklin Huffhines,  
USMC***





**Submitted by PFC Huffhines' son, Tom Huffhines  
5th Marine Division Association**

John was born March 7, 1925, in Dallas, Texas. John joined the Marine Corps prior to high school graduation and left for boot camp immediately upon graduation in 1943. He wanted to be a Marine Raider, but he was six feet four inches tall and they told him he would get his head shot off. So, he went to telephone lineman's school where he learned to keep combat units connected. Soon he was camped on a lava field in Hawaii. He was placed in the 5th Division and was sent to Iwo Jima with his comrades for 36 days.

When John hit the beach at Iwo Jima, it was just about the time the Japanese defenders unleashed their heavy artillery. They had been waiting for the beach to get crowded and, in the hellish barrage, he buried his face in the sand and knew it was the end of the world. Then he shook it off and rose up. John kept the telephone lines operational on Iwo Jima even as bullets flew all around and shells were landing. He had to remain alert because you never knew when one of the enemy would spring up from a hole. It was a long, dirty month of battle.

Back on Hawaii after a nightmarish month on Iwo Jima, the unit began training for the assault on Japan. The assault on Japan did not occur. After the surrender of Japan, the 5th Division occupied Japan for several months in Nagasaki.

Upon discharge from the Marines in May of 1946, John returned to Dallas attending North Texas State and then graduating from SMU in 1950 with a degree in accounting. John was not injured and came back to Texas to run a business, marry and have a family.

Yet even with no physical injuries from the bloody battle, scars were there. We heard Tokyo Rose come on the radio on the ships going over, saying we'd probably take the island, but our shirts would be "red before we got through, red with blood," "I was awful scared. But most everybody was that had any sense.

My dad didn't talk about it much until after he started taking part in the reunions. The reunions were tremendous therapy for these Marines. They got together. They relived some of their training and the battle. They cried about the brothers they lost. So after a few years of going through these reunions, my dad started talking about the war to the family.

Throughout his career and among many organizations, John served as president of the Oak Cliff Cosmopolitan Club, Hutchins Chamber of Commerce, Texas Propane Gas Assn. and the Fifth Marine Division Assn. He served as a Texas director to the National Propane Gas Assn and as a director of South Central Bank of Oak Cliff.

John was active in the Big D detachment of the Marine Corps League, a member of the Methodist Church since 1935 and chairman of Huffhines Gas and Carburetion Equipment Inc. John was an amazing man, husband, father, friend, and Marine. He and his kind were the definition of the "Greatest Generation".

John loved his family. He was passionate about his Country. He made us all laugh with his great sense of humor. We honor him for his integrity. We will remember him for all these things.

John Franklin Huffhines passed away peacefully on Friday, November 18, 2016 in Weatherford, TX, where he had lived since December 2015.

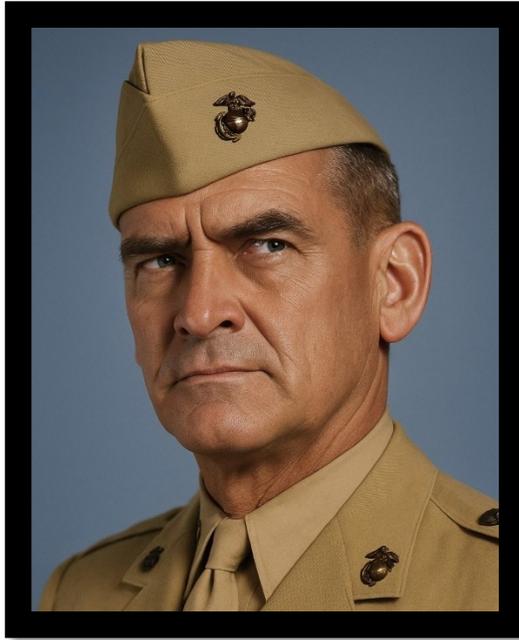




***Master Gunnery Sergeant John Vernon Berg***

*Alfredo Cooke presenting*





***Master Gunnery Sergeant John Vernon Berg,  
U.S.M.C.***



**From Iwo Jima to Dong Ha –  
The Long War of Master Gunnery Sergeant John Vernon Berg**

**U.S. Marine Corps – Silver Star, Iwo Jima (1945) – KIA, Vietnam (1968)**

He had already earned his place among heroes long before Vietnam. Platoon Sergeant John Vernon Berg, United States Marine Corps, received the Silver Star for gallantry on Iwo Jima, one of the bloodiest battles in Marine Corps history.

**Silver Star**

**Awarded for actions during the World War II**

*The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Platoon Sergeant John Vernon Berg (MCSN: 287924), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while serving with Headquarters Company, Twenty-Sixth Marines, FIFTH Marine Division, during action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, 15 March 1945. Undaunted by hostile small arms fire, Platoon Sergeant Berg boldly led an armored tractor over two hundred yards of treacherous terrain, thereby enabling the vehicle to clear a road for our advancing troops and tanks. Returning to lead the advance of two tanks over the new road, he directed accurate tank fire against the enemy. By his courage and initiative, Platoon Sergeant Berg upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.*

**Action Date: March 15, 1945**

More than twenty years later, the Marine who had helped take Iwo Jima was still serving - older, seasoned, and leading from the front. By October 1968, Master Gunnery Sergeant John V. Berg was with Headquarters Company, Headquarters Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, stationed at Dong Ha Combat Base, in Quang Tri Province, Republic of Vietnam.

On October 30, 1968, Dong Ha came under a sudden and devastating enemy 130mm artillery barrage. Berg and two fellow Marines - Sergeant Major Harlan L. Graham and Corporal Richard E. Turner - took cover in a trench as shells rained down. One round landed close, killing all three instantly with fragmentation wounds.

Thus ended the long war of a Marine who had fought in two wars. A man who stood his ground from the black sands of Iwo Jima to the red dust of Vietnam.

Master Gunnery Sergeant Berg's service spanned from the crucible of World War II through the twilight years of Vietnam, linking generations of Marines through duty, valor, and sacrifice. His life stands as a rare testament to the enduring spirit of the Corps - faithful from first to last.

**WWII:** Headquarters Company, 26th Marines, 5th Marine Division – Silver Star

**Vietnam:** Headquarters Company, Headquarters Battalion, 3rd Marine Division

**Died:** 30 October 1968 – Dong Ha Combat Base, Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam

**Cause:** Hostile – Artillery Attack

**Decorations:** ★ Silver Star ★ Purple Heart (WWII & Vietnam) ★ WWII Victory Medal ★

National Defense Service Medal ★ Vietnam Service Medal

**From the black sands of Iwo Jima to the red earth of Vietnam, he carried the Marine Corps spirit across two wars — faithful until the end.**





## ***Corporal James "Jim" Nickel***

*Alfredo Cooke presenting*



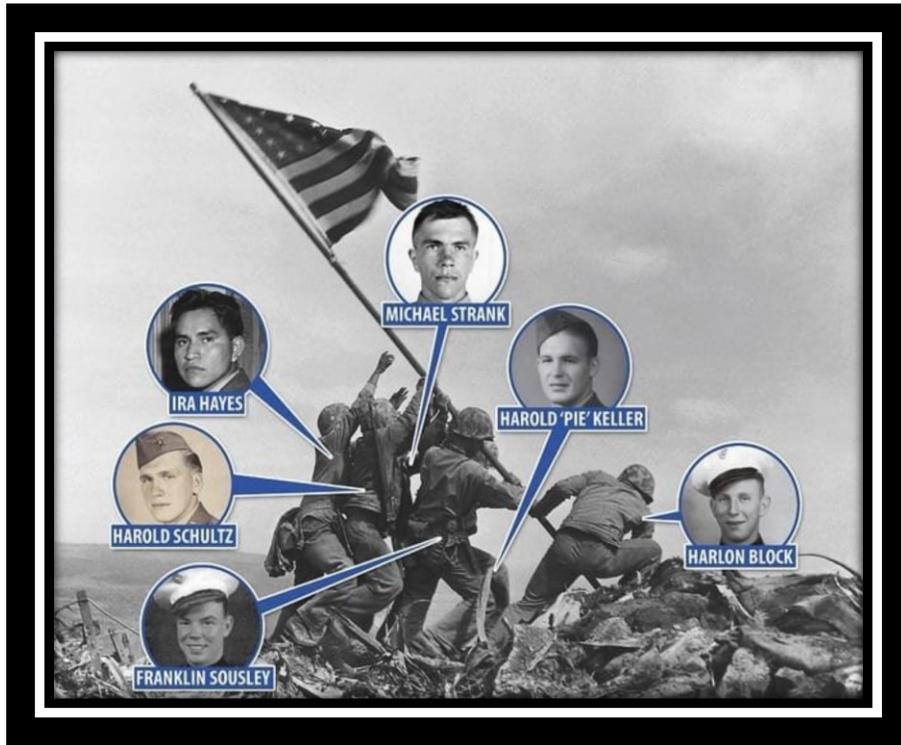


***Corporal James "Jim" Nickel***





## Setting the Record Straight



***“Why does it matter who raised the flag on Iwo Jima? Don’t those men represent all Marines?”*** That question has come from high school students and even from a young Marine Private First Class. It is a fair question, one that deserves an honest answer.

When I explain that the Marine Corps took years to carefully investigate and correct the names of the flag raisers, people begin to understand. It is not about pride or publicity. It is about truth, and truth matters deeply to those who serve and to the families who wait for them to come home. For decades, some parents and families believed their sons were part of that historic moment. Others knew in their hearts that their loved one was there but could not prove it. Imagine the weight of that uncertainty carried for so many years. The investigations gave those families something precious. Not fame, but closure and peace. To finally know the truth of where their son stood on that day was a matter of honor and healing.

The Marine Corps’ commitment to finding the truth was also a reflection of what the Corps stands for. Accuracy and integrity are part of its character. Setting the record straight was a way of saying that every Marine’s service counts, and that history should never be written on assumption when it can be written on fact.

At the same time, the image itself represents far more than six men and a flag. Even if we never knew their names, those figures on Mount Suribachi would still stand for all Marines, past and present, who have fought side by side in the face of danger. They represent courage, unity, and the belief that no Marine fights alone. The Marine Corps is not built on individual glory. It is built on teamwork, and on the simple truth that victory belongs to the many who serve together.

So yes, it mattered that the names were corrected. It mattered to the families who finally knew the truth. It mattered to the Marine Corps that its history was honest. And it matters to all of us, because the flag they raised still reminds the world of what can be accomplished when courage and teamwork stand together.



## Raising the First Flag

A U.S. flag was first raised atop Mount Suribachi soon after the mountaintop was captured at around 10:20 a.m. on February 23, 1945. Staff Sergeant Louis R. Lowery of *Leatherneck* magazine, who accompanied the patrol, photographed the first flag raising.



- **1st Lt. Harold Schrier**, kneeling behind radioman's legs
- **PFC. Raymond Jacobs**, radioman reassigned from F Company
- **Sgt. Henry "Hank" Hansen** wearing cap, holding flagstaff with left hand,
- **Platoon Sgt. Ernest "Boots" Thomas**, seated
- **PVT. Phil Ward**, holding lower flagstaff with his right hand,
- **PhM2c. John Bradley**, USN, holding flagstaff with both hands, his right hand above Ward's right hand and his left hand below
- **PFC. James Michels** holding M1 Carbine
- **Cpl. Charles W. Lindberg** standing above Michels

Lieutenant Colonel Chandler W. Johnson, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division, ordered Marine Captain Dave Severance, commander of Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, to send a platoon to seize and occupy the crest of Mount Suribachi. First Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, executive officer of Easy Company, who had replaced the wounded Third Platoon commander John Keith Wells, volunteered to lead a 40-man combat patrol up the mountain.

Lieutenant Colonel Johnson, or First Lieutenant George G. Wells, the battalion adjutant whose job it was to carry the flag, had taken the 54 by 28-inch flag from the battalion's transport ship, USS *Missoula*, and handed it to Schrier. Johnson said to Schrier, "If you get to the top, put it up." Schrier assembled the patrol at eight in the morning to begin the climb.

Despite the large number of Japanese troops in the area, Schrier's patrol reached the rim of the crater at about 10:15, coming under little or no enemy fire, as the Japanese were being heavily bombarded at the time. The flag was attached by Schrier and two Marines to a Japanese iron water pipe found on top, and the flagstaff was raised and planted by Schrier, assisted by Platoon Sergeant Ernest Thomas and Sergeant Oliver Hansen at about 10:30.

The raising of the national colors immediately caused loud cheering from Marines, sailors, and Coast Guardsmen on the beaches below and from the men aboard ships nearby. The sound and the blasts of ship horns alerted the Japanese, who until that moment had remained in their cave bunkers. Schrier and his men near the flagstaff came under fire, but the Marines quickly eliminated the threat. Schrier was later awarded the Navy Cross for volunteering to lead the patrol and raise the American flag, and a Silver Star for later heroism in command of D Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines.

This first flag, however, was too small to be seen clearly from the northern side of the mountain, where fighting would continue for several days.

That same morning, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal came ashore to witness the final stage of the fight for Suribachi. As he looked up and saw the flag waving in the wind, he turned to Lieutenant General Holland "Howlin' Mad" Smith and said, "Holland, the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next five hundred years." Forrestal was so moved by the sight that he requested the Second Battalion's flag as a souvenir.

Lieutenant Colonel Johnson was infuriated when he heard this. The flag, he insisted, belonged to his battalion. He ordered his assistant operations officer, Lieutenant Ted Tuttle, to secure a replacement flag from the beach and bring it up the mountain. As Tuttle left, Johnson called after him, "And make it a bigger one!"

Following Johnson's orders passed down through Captain Severance, Sergeant Michael Strank, a squad leader from Second Platoon, was instructed to take three members of his rifle squad...

- Corporal Harlon Block
- Private First Class Franklin Sousley
- Private First Class Ira Hayes

... and raise the replacement flag. Severance also sent...

- Private First Class Rene Gagnon

... the battalion runner, to obtain fresh walkie-talkie batteries to carry up the mountain.

Lieutenant Albert Tuttle located a larger flag measuring 96 by 56 inches aboard LST-779 and brought it to the command post. Johnson gave the flag to Gagnon with instructions to take it to Schrier and raise it, bringing the first flag down. According to the official Marine Corps record, the flag had originally been obtained from Navy Ensign Alan Wood aboard LST-779, who had received it from a supply depot in Pearl Harbor. The flag was sewn by Mabel Sauvageau, a worker at the flag loft of Mare Island Naval Shipyard.

The first and second flags raised on Mount Suribachi are now preserved in the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Virginia. The second flag, which endured high winds at the summit, remains one of the most recognized symbols of American valor.

First Lieutenant George Greeley Wells, the battalion adjutant, later stated that Johnson ordered him to obtain the second flag. Wells sent Gagnon to the ships to find one, and Gagnon returned with the flag that was then raised. Wells received the first flag back from Gagnon and secured it at the battalion command post.

Coast Guardsman Robert Resnick, said that Gagnon boarded LST-758 looking for a flag, and that Resnick gave him one from a bunting box with his commanding officer's permission. Resnick spoke publicly about this only shortly before his death in 2004.

Gagnon, Strank, and the three Marines reached the top of the mountain around noon without coming under fire. Photographer Joe Rosenthal, along with Marine photographers Sergeant Bill Genaust and Private First Class Bob Campbell, were climbing the mountain at the same time. On the way up they met Lowery, who told them the summit was a perfect place to take photos.

When Rosenthal reached the top, he began setting up his camera for a scenic shot, piling rocks to stand on for a better view. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the Marines beginning to raise the second flag. Quickly swinging his camera upward, he snapped the famous photograph without using the viewfinder. Sergeant Genaust, standing beside him, captured the same moment on motion-picture film.

Of the six flag raisers identified in Rosenthal's photograph...

- Ira Hayes
- Harold Schultz
- Michael Strank
- Franklin Sousley
- Harold Keller
- Harlon Block

only **Hayes**, **Keller**, and **Schultz** survived the battle. **Strank** and **Block** were killed on March 1, and **Sousley** was killed on March 21.

Soon after publication, the names of the flag raisers were released, but several were later found to be incorrect. The confusion arose from the chaos of battle, the existence of two separate flag raisings, and the tragic loss of many involved. Survivors' memories were imperfect, and wartime pressure to name the heroes quickly led to errors.

Pfc. Ira Hayes, a Pima Native American and one of the three survivors, privately protested the official identifications. He told Harlon Block's mother that her son, not Henry Hansen as first reported, was in the photograph. His claims were initially ignored until 1947, when the Marine Corps officially corrected the record.

For many years, Navy corpsman John Bradley was also believed to appear in the photo, largely because of his silence and the later publication of his son's book *Flags of Our Fathers*. Later photographic analysis, however, revealed that it was Marine Harold Schultz in that position.

The mistaken belief that the photograph was staged also began soon after it was published. When Joe Rosenthal returned from Mount Suribachi on February 23, reporters asked whether his flag-raising picture had been posed. Rosenthal thought they were referring to another image he had taken of Marines gathered around the flag after it was raised - a posed photo known as the "Gung Ho" shot - and answered, **"Yes!"**



That single **"Yes"** word spread rapidly, leading the public to believe that the iconic image had been staged. Rosenthal spent years clarifying that the actual flag raising had been spontaneous and unplanned. His photograph captured, in a single moment, the teamwork, courage, and sacrifice that defined the Marines on Iwo Jima.

# *Iwo Jima Taps*

## 2025

<b>Marine</b>	<b>Born</b>	<b>Died</b>
Leo William Walker	November 13, 1926	October 1, 2025
Walter A. Laba	October 17, 1923	October 2, 2025
Roy B. James	January 14, 1925	October 13, 2025
Charles C. Holdeman, Jr.	September 15, 1926	October 3, 2025
John B. Robinson	April 30, 1923	September 29, 2025
Herbert Altshuler	June 6, 1924	September 28, 2025
Eugene F. Iaconetti	birth date not located	August 21, 2025
Nimrod T. Clark	March 7, 1926	September 20, 2025
John G. Hudson	July 17, 1925	June 2, 2025
Roy Leroy Martinson	June 23, 1926	January 13, 2025
Duane Lyle Tunnyhill	January 26, 1926	January 18, 2025
Russell J. Sullivan	birth date not located	January 18, 2025
Francis Thomas Duffy	August 16, 1923	November 4, 2025
Dorsey O'Neal Walker	January 1, 1925	November 3, 2025

### INVASION OF IWO JIMA

It's nothing but an island  
In miles five by three,  
But what a great rock fortress,  
That it turned out to be.

Filled with dead volcanos,  
A natural fort to stand,  
Defended by, yellow insects,  
Opposed by stalwart hands

They call it Iwo Jima,  
Her watch-dog of the sea,  
It's one of many strongholds,  
We'll take for victory.

For days and nights we stormed it,  
With tons of bombs and shells,  
By planes and battlewagons,  
To make a living hell.

Then we made our landings,  
And it was hell on earth,  
A fight gained by inches,  
God only knows its worth.

No quarter asked or given,  
With blood shed all the way,  
A terrific battle waging,  
To make history for our day.

We landed our equipment,  
And provisions of all kinds,  
The fourth division of Marines,  
with the fifth in close behind.

Then the big explosion came,  
It was the Japs first stand,  
To protect and guard the Island,  
That had always been their land

It was leading men to slaughter,  
When first they went ashore,  
They fought and died like heroes  
to win peace forevermore.

We lost the men like ten pins,  
But they carried bravely on,  
The third division replaced them  
To establish right from wrong.

Our airplanes hammered from above  
The marines fought on the ground  
The battleships from the shoreline  
And whittled the enemy down.

The seventh day was "V" day,  
Behold Old Glory flew,  
To show our strength of arms,  
With victory in view.

Heroes were born and died there,  
As the battle raged on its way,  
They gave their young lives freely  
For their country; in peace to stay

So bless the souls, O God,  
That went to the great beyond,  
And keep and guide their family,  
With faith to carry on.

BY:

*Rollin A. Strong*  
Rollin A. Strong S2c

This poem is currently at "Our Heroes Military Museum" in Lincoln, Maine. Earlier this year a woman walked in with some documents she found in a wall at a house that was being torn down. The Museum staff are looking for any information on them, especially this poem entitled 'Invasion of Iwo Jima' by Rollin A. Strong S2c.

If you have any information on the poem or the veteran, contact the Museum.

# Marines

You can have your Army khakis,  
You can have your Navy blues,  
I have another fighting man,  
to introduce to you.

His uniform is different,  
the finest ever seen,  
the Germans call him Devil Dog,  
his real name is Marine!

He was born on Parris Island,  
the land that God forgot,  
Where the sand is 18" deep,  
the sun is blazing hot.

He gets up in the morning,  
way before the sun,  
he'll run a hundred miles or more  
before the sun goes down.

So listen to me ladies,  
to what I have to say,  
Find yourself a tough Marine,  
for each and every day.

He'll hug you and he'll kiss you  
He'll never be untrue  
There's nothing in this world  
a Marine cannot do.

When I die and go to Heaven,  
St. Peter I will tell,  
Another Marine reporting Sir!  
I've spent my time in HELL!

And as I look around me,  
Oh what will I see,  
A hundred thousand more Marines,  
standing next to me!



**HONORING  
THEIR LEGACIES**