

“Life Lesson” by John Smink

The one experience that had taught me something that I could never have learned anywhere else was my experience serving in the Marine Corp during World War II.

As a young man growing up in the 1930's life was a lot different. We did not have cell phones or internet to communicate. I was sent to Elyria, Ohio at the age of 16 years old to live with my sister due to financial reasons. I began working at Acme Beverages and worked there until I was 18 years old. After my return from the military I became a part owner of this business.

On November 11, 1943 I turned 18 years old and was required to register for the military. I went to the local recruiting office and advised the recruiter that I wanted to enlist in the Military. They asked what branch I was interested in and I responded “wherever you need me.” It was at that time that I was assigned to the Marine Core 5th Division, 28th Reg South Pacific. I departed on January 7, 1944 and was assigned to Hilo Hawaii. It was there that I was trained for the Iwo Jira invasion. On February 19, 1945 we “hit” the Green Beach for a 36 day invasion.

Being the third wave of men to “hit” the beach, I had to jump off of the ship because the ramp would not work. As we hit the beach under a tremendous amount of enemy fire, I was hit in the leg almost immediately, which only made me run faster. During the invasion I was hit in the shoulder and the knee and was sent to the hospital on the ship. Because of all of the injuries and casualties aboard the ship, we were given the option to return to the United States. I choose to stay and finish the battle, it is what I had started. At the end of the 36 day invasion I was one of (9) original Marines that walked off of that beach. We had started with 250 men.

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This experience is one that I have carried with me my whole life. Not only did I learn to succeed no matter what the cost, I was made a man at a very young age, I grew to respect and understand that in order to succeed in life you can never give up. The freedoms that we experience everyday of our lives have not come without sacrifice. I witnessed many casualties of war and the heartbreak that comes with each injury or death. I lost many friends in that battle. It only made me stronger. I made a vow to myself, I would always carry the respect of the men and women who fight for our freedom and never take anything for granted. The sacrifices and heartache that is experienced in the time of war is something that no one will ever understand unless you live it first hand.

I have spent my life working hard to achieve the American dream that our past and present military fight for us. I have taught not only my own 6 beautiful children, but also my grandchildren to love and respect the freedoms that we have, because they do not come without sacrifice. That I know first hand.