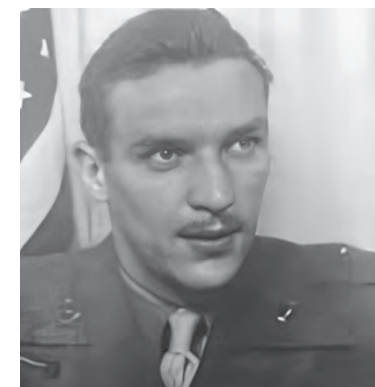


IWO JIMA SURVIVORS

'They Will Never Be Forgotten'

"The Greatest Generation may be getting smaller, but we need to make sure they will never be forgotten."

— Marine Corps Commandant, Gen. David Berger



Louis Bourgault



Dale Faughn



Roy Earle



Ivan Hammond



Marion Noel

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



PHOTO BY FRED LASH

Members of the Arlington County police department pose for a photo with survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima Feb. 17 at the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington. The officers provided a motorcycle escort for the veterans during their visit to the memorial, which marked the 78th anniversary of the battle.

Survivors gather to mark 78th anniversary of Iwo Jima.

By JEANNE THEISMANN
THE CONNECTION

The morning of Feb. 19, 1945, dawned eerily quiet as Dale Faughn made his way toward the shores of the remote Japanese island of Iwo Jima. But in an instant, the 20-millimeter dual purpose guns buried in the side of Mount Suribachi exploded, erupting into one of the bloodiest battles in U.S. history.

Faughn, just 18 years old, was one of the first Marines to land on the tiny Pacific Island, where he would remain until the battle ended in late March. Trained as a Scout sniper, he served with the 5th Division, 26th Regiment.

"We expected the battle to last five or six days," Faughn said. "Instead it went on for weeks. I wish I could tell you some hero stories but I was not a hero. The most memorable thing about Iwo Jima was not what I did there but what being there did for me."

Faughn was one of eight survivors to gather in Arlington over President's Day weekend to mark the 78th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima.



PHOTO BY JOHN BORDNER/THE CONNECTION

Dale Faughn, right, recounts his experiences in the Battle of Iwo Jima as fellow survivors Juan Montano and Mathias "Matt" Gutman look on. The veterans panel discussion took place Feb. 18 at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton marking the 78th anniversary of the battle.

vors to gather in Arlington over President's Day weekend to mark the 78th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima.

"Three years ago we had more than 50 Iwo Jima survivors gath-

er at the 75th reunion," said David Fields, a board member of the Iwo Jima Association of America that sponsored the gathering. "This year only eight veterans were able

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PHOTO BY FRED LASH



PHOTO BY JOHN BORDNER/THE CONNECTION

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger, center left, gathers with survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima Feb. 18 at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton. Shown are Dale Faughn, Mathias "Matt" Gutman, Ivan Montano, past Marine Commandant Alfred M. Gray, Commandant Berger, Marine Corps Sgt. Major Troy Black, Ivan Hammond, Marion Noel, Roy Earle and Louis Bourgault.

'We Are in Their Debt'

Iwo Jima veterans have shaped my life.

By DEAN LAUBACH
SPECIAL TO THE CONNECTION

Feb. 19 marked a solemn and historic day. Seventy-eight years ago, nearly 80,000 brave American souls began a 36-day saga to capture the island of Iwo Jima. The anniversary was marked with a reunion which eight survivors were able to attend. Five Marines. Three sailors. All in their mid- or late-90s, they gathered to share memories of that life-changing event. They recollect with each other, and with the younger generations in whose hands is placed the task of honoring their legacy.

I am 26 years old. At minimum, I am 6-8 years older than the average Marine infantryman at Iwo Jima. Many, if not most, were in their late teens, with a 23-year-old considered an old man. They faced a tenacious enemy in the entrenched Japanese defenders, but they conquered Iwo's volcanic sands with a perseverance that comes from within.

My great-uncle was a Colonel in the 5th Amphibious Corps, which was comprised of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions. He died at age 100, three years before I was born. In 2016, I found myself attending this reunion in his memory. Because of someone I never met, I was blessed be-

yond measure to be befriended by kind, witty, tremendously enjoyable men who have shaped me during the most formative time in my life. Without knowing it, they filled a void which came when my grandfather passed away when I was 13. By their convictions, conduct, and their forthright strength of character, they have passed on wisdom only they can impart.

I have made and lost many dear friends since that first reunion. With tears in my eyes I remember the memories I have made with members of "The Old Breed." E. B. Sledge's prolific nickname rings true. The accounts of a combat few can fathom still boggles my mind. We are in their debt for the life we live today, with all its modern conveniences and the air of freedom. My life has been forever changed because of them, for having shared their company.

Nearly 7,000 Americans gave their lives to conquer Iwo. Let us bow our heads and give thanks. To the Marines and Corpsmen especially, Semper Fidelis.

Dean Laubach is a 26-year-old graduate student now serving as web developer for the 5th Marine Division Association. He traveled five hours from his home in Pennsylvania to attend the reunion of Iwo Jima veterans.

Survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima pose for a photo following a wreath laying Feb. 17 at the Marine Corps War Memorial to mark the 78th anniversary of the battle. Flanking MGSgt Roger Roll, holding the wreath, are veterans Dale Faughn, Juan Montano, Ivan Hammond and Louis Bourgault.

IWO JIMA SURVIVORS

Survivors Gather to Mark 78th Anniversary of Iwo Jima



Ivan Hammond holds a funeral card for his wife at a reunion of survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima Feb. 17 in Arlington.



Roy Earle, 99, talks about the Battle of Iwo Jima during a reunion of survivors Feb. 17 in Arlington.

PHOTO BY JEANNE THEISSMANN/THE CONNECTION



Marine Lt. Gen. Norman Smith (ret), center, visits with Ivan Hammond, and Juan Montano at a gathering of survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima Feb. 17 at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton.

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to return.”

The Battle of Iwo Jima was an intense, 36-day battle that became one of the major turning points in WWII. The raising of the American flag on Feb. 23, 1945, atop Mount Suribachi was immortalized in a Pulitzer-Prize winning photograph by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal.

“We don’t call them the Greatest Generation for nothing,” said Marine Corps Commandant David Berger. “They have done so much more after they fought against a determined foe. They have inspired generations of Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen. They forged the spirit of this nation and today they embody the American spir-

it.”

Approximately one-third of all Marines killed in action during World War II were killed on Iwo Jima. More than 100,000 Americans fought there and 6,821 died as a result — 5,931 of them Marines.

Former Marine Corps Commandant Alfred Gray was presented with the IJAA’s Woody Williams Award, named in honor of Herschel Woodrow “Woody” Williams, a Marine survivor of Iwo Jima and the last living Medal of Honor recipient from WWII prior to his death in 2022.

The four-day series of events for the reunion included a veterans panel, a visit to the National Museum of the Army at Fort Belvoir and wreath-laying ceremonies at the

WWII Memorial and the Marine Corps War Memorial.

Iwo Jima veterans attending the reunion at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton included Ivan Hammond, Louis Bourgault, Juan Montano, Marion Noel, Dale Faughn, Roy Earle, Mathias “Matt” Gutman and Ted Below.

“I took in the third wave of Marines, when

the Japanese opened fire,” said Montano, who piloted one of the landing vehicles. “Marines were dying getting off my boat. Then I turned around and took our casualties back to the hospital ships.”

Marion Noel, 98, was on LST 779 which provided the flag raised on Mount Suribachi.

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Marion Noel, 98, right, shows VFW Post 609 Commander Jerry Krueger where he landed on the shores of Iwo Jima in 1945 during a reunion of survivors Feb. 17 at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton marking the 78th anniversary of the battle.



Ivan Hammond signs a photo from the Battle of Iwo Jima at a reunion of survivors Feb. 17 at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton.



Marine Corps Commandant David Berger, left, poses for a photo with Iwo Jima survivor Mathias “Matt” Gutman Feb. 18 at the Crystal City National Landing Hilton.

IWO JIMA SURVIVORS

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FROM PAGE 7

Theodore "Ted" Below came ashore in the first wave on Iwo Jima, where he was pinned down on the beach before eventually working to destroy the elaborate cave system built by the Japanese.

Mathias "Matt" Gutman served 22 years in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Navy Reserves beginning with World War II where he served in six invasions including Iwo Jima.

Preston White, a Plebe at the U.S. Naval Academy, traveled from Annapolis to meet the Iwo Jima veterans.

"I saw this was happening and wanted to come be a part of it," White said. "Hearing the stories from Iwo Jima, Okinawa and other Pacific battles gives you a sense of the personal cost of war. It drives home how important it is to remember their sacrifice."

Seeing the flag raising inspired Faughn to embark on a writing career, which included poetry and his being named as the Poet Laureate of Kentucky in 1986. He closed the veterans panel with a reading of his poem "I Met the Flag on Iwo Jima."

"I was so moved by what I saw it became the genesis of my poetry writing," Faughn said.

"While we know who these men are here tonight, we need to make sure our children and grandchildren know their stories," Berger said. "We need to talk more about it and not just on Memorial Day or Veterans Day. These stories can't stop with them."

Berger recognized and praised the younger veterans in the room as he closed out his remarks at the reunion gathering.

"From the beaches of Iwo Jima all the way to Af-



PHOTO BY JOHN BORDNER/THE CONNECTION
Marine veteran David Fields prepares to lead the Iwo Jima veterans panel with Mathias "Matt" Gutman.

ghanistan — every story has the power to inspire the young people who will lead us into the future," Berger said. "The Greatest Generation may be getting smaller, but we need to make sure they will never be forgotten. Thank you for courage, sacrifice and ideals of freedom. We will make it our mission to make sure that your legacy doesn't stop here."



Surrounding a photo of Marion Noel is a display of Iwo Jima ephemera at a reunion of survivors Feb. 17 in Arlington.



Naval Academy midshipman Preston White, center poses for a photo with Iwo Jima survivors Ivan Hammond and Mathias "Matt" Gutman.

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