

STRIKING SIXTH

1st Provisional Marine Brigade Newsletter



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WWII Letters and Photos Resurface

by Carroll McGowan

Harry Dininger grew up in Freeport, PA, a small town north of Pittsburgh. He was a three sport letterman and president of the class of 1938 at Freeport High. Not long after graduation, Harry joined the Marine Corps. He eventually became part of the 22nd Regiment and fought the Japanese on Engebi and Parry in the Marshall Islands. Shortly after the battle ended in February 1944, Harry sent a letter to his parents enclosing five photos of

Japanese citizens (see below and page 2). He wrote, "I sort of thought you would like to see what the people we are fighting look like."

Harry's next battle was on Guam in July-August 1944. He was shot in the arm and spent several months recovering in a hospital on New Caledonia. He returned to his Regiment, now part of the Sixth Marine Division, in time for the invasion of Okinawa in April 1945.

(continued on next page)

Marshall Islands: Eniwetok Atoll



Source: Esri

Post-Gazette



photo of Japanese family sent home by Harry Dininger (22nd Regiment) in 1944

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WWII Letters and Photos Resurface

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Feb. 26, 1943

Dearest Mother & Dad;

I dropped you a few lines yesterday and I decided to write you again today to make sure one of the letters reach you.

There isn't alot to write about, other than I am O.K. & in the best of health and getting along swell.

I have been in two landings so far, you probably read about them in the papers.

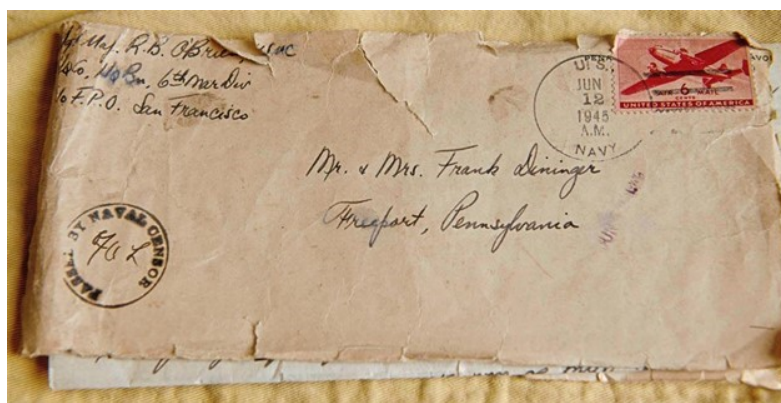
We made our landings in the Marshalls on the Eniwetok atoll and took the islands of Engebi and Parry. There isn't alot I can write about it; at present.

above & right: Japanese photos sent by Harry Dinger to his parents in 1944

left: letter Harry sent to his parents in 1944

(Note: the year written on the letter is incorrect)

below: envelope containing letter to Harry's parents about his death on Okinawa in 1945



WWII Letters and Photos Resurface

(continued from prior page)

Meanwhile, Harry's older brother Bob was a paratrooper with the 101st Airborne and had landed in Normandy on D-Day. He later fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Bob and Harry wrote letters to each other and to their parents throughout the war.

After being shot on Guam, Harry wrote to his parents, "My arm is coming along swell and is healing up remarkable, be good as new in a short while. I sure would like to hear from you soon, so I could find out how things are going with Bob over on the other side. Right now things as a whole are going mighty good."

In August 1944, as he marched across France with the Allies, Bob wrote to Harry and told him the European war might be over soon. Then, he said, "the full force of our men can be turned in your direction. Don't get me wrong, I am not trying to insinuate that you need help but it sure would speed things up. After all, that's of utmost importance, the day when you and I can get back to the 'village.'" Harry was also optimistic in his letters home. Early in the Okinawa campaign, he wrote that the Marines had done their part, but the Army was "fouled up" and might need the Marines to help. "The dogfaces might be good over in Europe, but they aren't any good out here, but if I go down there, there isn't nothing to worry about." He added a P.S.: "Please don't worry Mom, as the way I see it I don't think of anything happening to me."

Sadly, Harry was wrong. He was killed near Naha City on May 10 when a machine-gun slug hit him in the chest. He was 25. Robert O'Brien, a sergeant major from Freeport who had grown up with Harry and also served in the Pacific, wrote to Harry's parents, "... he died bravely, and quickly, which is the best way for a soldier [sic] to die, if he has to die at all." Harry was buried on Okinawa, but in 1949 his body was shipped home and reinterred near his hometown.

Harry and Bob's letters, along with the Japanese photos, were found in 2002 by Bob's great nephew David Wassel when he was cleaning out Bob's house after his wife Mary died. (Bob had passed away in 1999.) There were 170 letters in a box in the basement.

After seeing the photographs, David thought they should be returned to the Japanese soldier's family. He explained, "If I was in their position, I imagine I would want someone to do this for me."

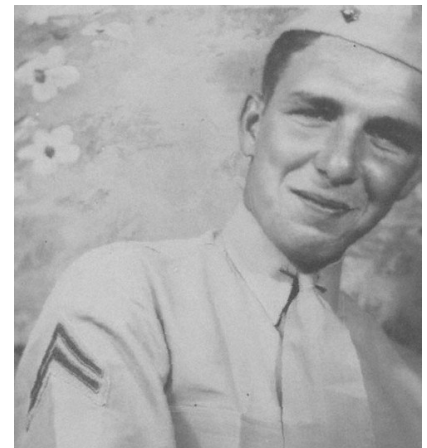
But finding the family half way around the world eighty years after the photos were taken is a tall order. Bob finally got some welcome assistance in 2018 when he met Mariko Fukuyama, an independent producer for Japanese media based in New York, when she was in western PA covering a story. With her help, David has since given interviews to Japanese media about the photographs. He

hasn't located the family yet, but he is hopeful. "We've narrowed it down. We know where Harry was, we have a timeline, and we know some of the Japanese units," he said, "But nobody's come forward yet to say, 'This is my family.'"

Sources:

"White Oak Man Searches for Family in Photos Taken from Japanese Soldier" by Torsten Ove, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 15, 2021.

"Fallen Marine's Family Returns Japanese Photos Carried Into Combat During WWII" by Seth Robson, *Stars and Stripes*, June 7, 2021.



top: Harry Dininger (22nd Regiment)
bottom: Harry's brother, Bob Dininger

From the Historian's Corner

UNIT DESIGNATIONS IN WORLD WAR II

I have recently had inquiries about the Sixth Marines that were in fact referring to the Sixth Regiment, which was not part of the Sixth Marine Division. Since we have fewer “experts” around than we used to, I thought it might help to explain some of designations that World War II Marines used and what they meant.

You may have noticed that most World War II Marines designate themselves in this manner — “F Co. 29th” or “G Co. 22nd.” Sometimes they will add Sixth Marine Division, when they think it needs to be indicated. They say they were in Fox Company, 29th Regiment, Sixth Marine Division.

Although you sometimes see the terms battalion and regiment used interchangeably, they are not interchangeable but actually two different designations.

The Marine Corps mission in World War II was to be an amphibious force used for the island-hopping campaign. Battalions were tactical units but were not employed as landing teams, which was the job of the Marine Corps in World War II. Therefore, it is nuanced but incorrect to say that the Marine Corps, or Army, conducted battalion landings in the Second World War. Battalions in World War II were engineer and artillery units.

The Tenth Army, which fought on Okinawa, was the last army command established during the Pacific War. It was made up of

both Marine and Army Divisions. On Okinawa, there were two Marine Corps divisions — the 1st and the 6th (with the 2nd in reserve) — plus four Army divisions — the 7th, 27th, 77th and 96th Infantry Divisions.

The Tenth Army was commanded by General Simon Bolivar Buckner until he was killed on June 18, 1945. He was the highest-ranking American officer killed in World War II. He was replaced by a Marine aviator, General Roy Geiger. Then later, Joseph Stillwell replaced him. An Army was made up of at least two Corps. A Corps consisted of at least two divisions. Geiger had been in charge of the III Amphibious Corps prior to becoming the Tenth Army commander.

The Sixth Division was commanded by Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. A division is made of at least three regiments. The Sixth Division had four regiments: the 4th commanded by Alan Shapley, the 15th commanded by Robert Luckey, the 22nd commanded by Merlin Schneider, and the 29th commanded by Victor Bleasdale. Many other units supported the “point of the spear” units, such as the 6th Tank Battalion, motor transportation units, and Navy medical units.

Interestingly, one of the lessons from World War II was that it is not a good idea to name companies in the same division and regiments with the same alpha-



Division Historian Laura Lacey

betical designations — for example, A Company 29th and A Company 22nd. On Peleliu, during the landing the same alpha designators led to confusion, and perhaps even deaths, as units got tangled and misplaced on the beach.

The way units are organized today in the Marine Corps is different than they were in April 1945. They have evolved from lessons learned and to accommodate the needs of the modern Marine Corps. The Marine Corps takes their units and makes them fit “every clime and place.”



Historian's Corner

(continued from prior page)

Army Unit Name	Military Group/ Unit Composition	Approximate Number of Personnel	Normally Commanded by
Army	2 or more Corps	100,000 to 150,000+	General or Field Marshal
Corps	2 or more Divisions	25,000 to 50,000	General or Lt. General
Division	3 or more Brigades or Regiments depending on the country.	10,000 to 15,000	Lieutenant General or Major General
Brigade	3 or more Battalions	1,500 to 3,500	Major General, Brigadier General, or Colonel
Regiment	2 or more Battalions	1,000 to 2,000	Colonel
Battalion	3 or more Companies	400 to 1,000	Lt. Colonel
Company	2 or more Platoons	100 to 250	Captain or Major
Platoon/ Troop	2 or more Squads	16 to 50	1st Lieutenant
Squad	2 or more Sections	8 to 24	Sergeant
Section/Fire Team		4 to 12	Sergeant or Corporal

Source: <http://www.worldwar2facts.org/ww2-army-units-and-sizes.html>

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6th Recon Company	Vacant
6th JASCO	Vacant
1st Amphibs	Vacant

Striking Sixth Newsletter

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pjpayne1984@verizon.net

Chaplain's Report



Several years ago, one of my outstanding former athletes, Laura, and her husband, Bill, came to see me at my birthday open house.

While visiting with other guests, Bill learned that I was a Sixth Division Marine. Ironically, his father, John Vincent "Roger" Wulf, was also a Sixth Division Marine. He passed away more than 40 years ago when Bill was only 19. Like many World War II veterans, Bill's father never spoke about his time in the war, and he never knew about the Association. (Bill is now a life member of the Association and a subscriber to the newsletter.)

Bill retired in January and finally has the time to research his father's military history. Recently, I had a special visit from Bill and Laura, and we looked through all the information I have about the Sixth Division. Unfortunately, we could not find anything about Roger or his unit, Sixth JASCO.

If you knew John Vincent "Roger" Wulf from Cleveland, Ohio (born in 1917) please let me know and I will share the information with Bill. We are hoping and praying that the Bill can learn more about his father's contributions to the war effort.

Your humble Chaplain,
Harry McKnight

Editor's Note

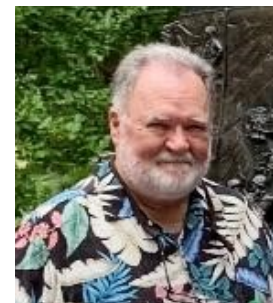


As you may have heard, I am the Webmaster for the Association's website. Which is kind of a joke because I have so

little technical knowledge of how websites work. Or perhaps I should say I have so little technical knowledge period. (I am someone who has trouble operating the remote control for our TV!) The only reason I am the Webmaster is because I have some experience editing websites and — more importantly — there was no one else to do it.

I knew enough to recognize that the website had grown old and clunky, but I had no idea how to fix it. So I asked if anyone could help. Robert Aydelotte, son-in-law of the late, great Watson Crumbie, volunteered to be our Website Consultant. He reworked the site to make it much easier to edit, saving me hours of work.

Recently Robert met with Connie and me to review the vendors we have been using to run the site. He suggested consolidating our services with one vendor, which will save us hundreds of dollars a year and enable us to keep the website going long into the future.



Website Consultant
Extraordinaire
Robert Aydelotte

On behalf of Connie, me, and the entire Association, thank you, Robert!!!

~Carroll
McGowan

Message from the President



I hope this message finds everyone well. I really miss getting together with my Marine family. As most of you already know, it has been my

personal mission to keep the Sixth Marine Division legacy alive, and I have had lots of help from members of "your" Board. I like to keep in touch with our precious Vets often and check on them with a phone call — at least the ones I have numbers for!

I would like to share a couple of recent stories that make this mission very dear to me.

The other day out of the blue I received a card from Lester Penny (29th Mar-2-HQ). It wasn't just any card, it was a Thank You card in which he expressed

his thanks to me for all that was and is done to keep the Sixth alive.

Next, I received a message from Ida Keane asking me if I had a Sixth Marine Division pin or knew where she could get one. Her uncle, Ross Laporte (6th Mar Div-HQ-HQ), lost his WWII veteran hat with that pin on it. That hat meant the world to him. Low and behold I had a pin and I sent it. I also discovered he didn't have a Sixth Marine Division hat, so I am sending him one of those separately.

If there is anything I can do for the Sixth Marine Division Vets within my power, I will try!

I just wanted to share how special you all are to me.

~Connie

Michael L. Sefcik

My father, Michael Leonard Sefcik, was a Corporal with the Marine Corps during the latter part of WWII. He was born and raised in Youngstown, OH. He was stationed as a guard at the Naval Weapons Depot at the Picatinny Arsenal in Kenvil, NJ. He married my Mom on 29 October 1944 and then deployed to the Pacific Theater in November 1944 with the 6th Marine Division. From what I can tell, Dad returned home to the U. S. sometime around March 1946 – a known date since my older sister was born on 14 December 1946! Between the end of the war on 09 August 1945 and his return home in March 1946, Dad was a driver for the (Colonel) Battalion Commander while the regiment was deployed to China.

As with most WWII Veterans, he didn't talk much about his experiences during the war. All we ever heard about was some boot camp stories, a night when he was on guard duty on Okinawa, and the China deployment.

I served in the USAF for 28 years, but for some unknown reason, I never queried him for more details. Unfortunately, he died on 15 Feb 2007.

Tom Sefcik
Conover, NC



Military Dioramas

I recently came across someone on Etsy who builds military dioramas. He donates 10% of all sales proceeds to the Disabled American Veterans.

I ordered a diorama in honor of my dad, John A. Albanese (15th Mar-3-H) and another related to my service. I mailed him one of my collar ornaments and he used it at the front gate wall on my diorama, which I thought was a neat personal connection.

I am attaching a couple of photos and a link to his site in case anyone in the Association would be interested. I am very pleased with his work.

DMCDioramas:
https://www.etsy.com/shop/DMCDioramas?ref=usf_2020

Best,
John J. Albanese



above: custom dioramas made by DMCDioramas to commemorate the military service of John A. Albanese (15th Mar-3-H), top, and John J. Albanese, bottom

6th Division Vet is Grand Marshal of Veterans Day Parade!

Last fall, 99-year old Joe Harrison (below) served as Grand Marshal of the second annual Veterans Day Parade in Beaumont, CA. He served for 30 months with the Marine Raiders and the Sixth Marine Division, including the Battle of Okinawa and the occupation of Japan.



Establishment of The General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., 6th Marine Division Award at VMI

While cleaning up various projects this afternoon, I found a footnote in "Tidewater Warrior," Tom Fitzpatrick's book about my grandfather, that explains the establishment in 1989 of the award that is given annually by VMI in his honor. I wish I'd found this source earlier when I was writing the article about the award that appeared in the fall 2022 Striking Sixth.

Here it is:

Surviving veterans of General Shepherd's Sixth Marine Division, through the Sixth Marine Division Association, Inc. - in collaboration with VMI and the VMI Foundation, Inc. - established The General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. '17, Sixth Marine Division Award at VMI for presenting annually to one or two top Marine graduates of the Naval ROTC or other USMC commissioning programs there; it consists of 25 -40 books for a professional military library - using the USMC professional reading list as a guide - and

is presented along with a footlocker suitable for mounting-out the books aboard ship; as funds generated by the Award's corpus grew, further provision was made for one or more grants to outstanding members of the VMI Corps of Cadets in the sophomore, junior or senior years seeking USMC commissions, preference being given to worthy descendants of the Sixth Marine Division veterans also seeking a Marine Corps commission; the first Award was presented at the 1989 graduation exercises and the first grants given after 1999; General Shepherd considered this Award the highest honor he had received as it would encourage scholarship and professionalism in the Marines' officer corps in perpetuity.

Source: *Tidewater Warrior: The World War I Years; General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., USMC, Twentieth Commandant* by Tom Fitzpatrick

Wishing everyone a peaceful and safe 2022,

Sallie Shepherd



Paul Owen Hotzler

My Grandfather was a part of the Sixth Marine Division. Unfortunately I never had an opportunity to meet him as he passed away at a young age when my father was only 16.

I'm trying to find any information I can about his time in the Division. His name is Paul Owen Hotzler and was a purple heart recipient I believe.

If anyone has any information about him, I would be happy to talk to you.

Thank you,

Bryce Hotzler
952-237-9178



Sixth Marine Division Association

Checking account balance
@ 2/22/23 = \$13,215



**We Wish a
Very Happy
100th Birthday
to
Floyd M. Hill
(6th Jasco)!**

**He turned 100
on January 27!**

Woody Williams, Last WWII Medal of Honor Winner, Dies at 98



The last surviving World War II Medal of Honor winner, Hershel “Woody” Williams, died on June 29 last year at the age of 98. He received this honor for exhibiting extraordinary bravery while attempting to clear an entrenched enemy position in the Battle of Iwo Jima. At the time, several Marines provided covering fire for Corporal Williams, two of whom were killed. Woody forever maintained the Medal of Honor did not belong to him, but that he wore it to honor the Marines who gave their life protecting his.

Woody was born and raised Quiet Dell, WV. He was the youngest of 11 children and attended a one-room schoolhouse. When he was 11, his father died of a heart attack, and his oldest brother took over the farm. Six of his brothers and sisters had died of the Spanish flu, so there was plenty of work on the farm for the children that remained.

Woody was 17 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. He wanted to join the Marines — he admired their dress blues — but his mother refused to sign the papers. When he turned 18, he was still unable to enlist because he was only 5-foot-6, two inches below the minimum height requirement. In 1943, the Marines lowered the height requirement by two inches, and Woody finally became a Marine.

After the war, like most servicemen, Woody never discussed his wartime experiences. He was unable to forgive himself for the lives he took, and he did his best to keep his memories at bay by downing beers at the VFW. But in 1962, something changed. As Woody described it, “I finally went to God to see if I could find some release and some forgiveness for what I had to do. And I found it.”

Woody continued to distinguish himself in his work as a counselor for the Department of Veterans Affairs where he advocated for veterans and military families. To this day, the Woody Williams Foundation honors families who have lost a loved one in service to their country. His interest in these Gold Star families began before he became a Marine — as World War II began, he delivered Western Union telegrams informing families of the death of their loved one. He never forgot those families.

May our country never forget Woody Williams’ service to our country.

Medal of Honor Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as demolition sergeant serving with the 21st Marines, 3d Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, 23 February 1945. Quick to volunteer his services when our tanks were maneuvering vainly to open a lane for the infantry through the network of reinforced concrete pillboxes, buried mines, and black volcanic sands, Cpl. Williams daringly went forward alone to attempt the reduction of devastating machine-gun fire from the unyielding positions. Covered only by four riflemen, he fought desperately for four hours under terrific enemy small-arms fire and repeatedly returned to his own lines to prepare demolition charges and obtain serviced flamethrowers, struggling back, frequently to the rear of hostile emplacements, to wipe out one posi-

tion after another. On one occasion, he daringly mounted a pillbox to insert the nozzle of his flamethrower through the air vent, killing the occupants, and silencing the gun; on another he grimly charged enemy riflemen who attempted to stop him with bayonets and destroyed them with a burst of flame from his weapon. His unyielding determination and extraordinary heroism in the face of ruthless enemy resistance were directly instrumental in neutralizing one of the most fanatically defended Japanese strongpoints encountered by his regiment and aided vitally in enabling his company to reach its objective. Cpl. Williams’ aggressive fighting spirit and valiant devotion to duty throughout this fiercely contested action sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.



TAPS

All of us in the Sixth Marine Division Association extend our sympathy to the family and friends of those listed below. May they rest in peace.

William R. Cloud	22nd Mar-H&S	03/23/22
Watson A. Crumbie	29th Mar-1-C	02/14/23
Clytice Gardner	wife of Burnis T. Gardner	12/01/22
Ralph Guerrero	15th Mar-2-D	02/10/23
William L. Lemen	22nd Mar-1-A	12/20/22
Willard Darrell Legg	22nd Mar-3-L	02/11/04
Edward H. Marsalek	6th Jasco (22nd Mar-2)	09/04/22
Robert Milliner	22nd Mar-2-F	07/31/20
Amos Patrick	Navajo code talker	12/29/69
Arno W. Schroeder	29th Mar-2-F	12/21/22
Michael Leonard Sefcik	6th Marine Division	02/15/07
Harry Elmer Shepardson III	22nd Marines	04/21/05

Reporting Deaths

**Please report deaths
as soon as possible to:**

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and

Harry McKnight
Chaplain
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William Lemen, Second Generation Marine



William "Bill" Lemen was born on April 19, 1926, in San Juan, Texas. In high school, he was president of his senior class, played football and basketball, and ran track. He attended Pan American College for one year before enlisting in the United States Marine Corp in 1944. He was a second generation Marine.

Bill became a rifleman with the 22nd Regiment of the 6th Marine Division and was deployed to Guadalcanal where he trained for the invasion of Okinawa. Fifteen months after he joined the Marines, he was severely wounded and lost an eye in the Battle of Okinawa.

After his discharge in 1945, Bill earned an undergraduate degree and law degree at the University of Texas. Subsequently, he returned to San Juan where he practiced law for 50 years until his retirement in 2000.

Throughout his life, Bill was active in his community. He served as Commissioner and Mayor of San Juan, President of the San Juan Lion's Club, and Board Member of the San Juan State Bank. He was also a Trustee, Deacon, and Sunday School teacher at his church.

Bill was devoted to his family and he enjoyed reading, writing, golf and duplicate bridge. He remained humble his entire life, as evidenced by the original one paragraph obituary he wrote for himself.

Bill was justifiably proud of his service with the Marines. He attended many reunions and served as Judge Advocate of his Regiment's association. He wrote several books describing his time during the war including *The Dueling 22nds*, a comparison of the American 22nd Regiment and the Japanese 22nd regiment that battled each other on Okinawa.

Rest in peace, Marine.

Watson Crumbie Is Now Toasting the 6th Division in Heaven



What do the Battle of Saipan, the Battle of Okinawa, and the Battle of Chosin Reservoir have in common? Well, they were among the bloodiest battles in Marine Corps history with 80% casualties in each. And here's something else: Watson Crumbie fought in all three. That he

lived to tell the tale is something of a miracle, for what are the odds of someone surviving all three of those battles without a nick or a scratch? His only absence from the field of battle was when he spent 36 hours in a hospital on Okinawa with a concussion.

Watson joined the Marine Corps in 1943, a month before his 18th birthday. He hoped to avenge the deaths of two close friends at Pearl Harbor. In summer 1944, he got his chance as an Infantry Assault Demolitionist with the 2nd Division in the decisive Battle of Saipan. Soon afterward, his battalion sailed to Guadalcanal where they became part of the newly formed 6th Marine Division. There they trained for the invasion of Okinawa, which took place on April 1, 1945. It took 82 days to secure the island, and Watson was thrilled to see the US flag raised at the southern end on June 22. After service in China where he witnessed the formal surrender of the Japanese, Watson returned home in February 1946.

Expecting a war with Russia, and not wanting to fight another war as a demolitionist, Watson joined the Marine Corps Reserves and became an artilleryman. He was called to Korea in 1950, ten days after marrying his first wife, Belva, in Texas.

After fighting in the bloodiest battle of the Pacific Theater in World War II, Watson found himself in the coldest battle in Marine Corps history. He was part of 30,000 UN forces that were surrounded by 120,000 Chinese Communist forces at the Chosin

Reservoir. They faced insurmountable odds. And it was cold; temperatures were far below zero.

Against all odds, the UN forces broke out while inflicting major casualties on the Chinese. As fighting continued, they walked 76 miles in 13 days to reach the coast, suffering many casualties along the way. Those who made it became known as the Chosin Few.

Many years later, Watson served as Chairman of the project to build the Jangjin (Chosin) Few Battle Monument at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico. Unfortunately, health problems prevented him from attending the dedication of the monument in 2017.

Watson was active in the Sixth Marine Division Association for many years, most recently serving on the Board of Directors. His contributions to the Association are many. Readers of this newsletter have probably picked up on the fact that Watson was an amateur sleuth.

For many years, no one knew what happened to the Sixth Division Colors which were originally unfurled on Guadalcanal when the Division was formed in 1944. Decades later, Watson located them at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Museum in San Diego where they were hanging in the back hallway. Thus began the process of getting them shipped to the National Museum of the Marine Corps where they could be restored.

Watson's sleuthing skills were also put to use in the search for the bottle of Chivas Regal that was given by 6th Division veterans to General Shepherd on the Marine Corps birthday in 1989. A plan was hatched to auction off the bottle at the Association's reunion each year, with the proceeds going to VMI, General Shepherd's alma mater. Key to the plan was for the last two survivors of the Division to propose a final toast to all the Division members who had passed before them. The bottle became known as the Last Man Bottle.

The auctions went as planned from 1990 to 2005, when the bottle disappeared and was eventually forgotten. By not by Watson. He located the bottle at VMI in 2021 and asked Colonel Keith Gibson to

(continued on the next page)

Watson Crumbie

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bring it to our final reunion later that year. There, seven 6th Division veterans – including Watson – drank a shot from the bottle and toasted their 6th Division brothers.

Thanks to his wonderful daughter Belva and her husband Robert, who drove him to the reunion from Texas, Watson was able to view the Chosin Few Monument, see the Colors displayed at the Marine Corps museum, and drink from the Last

Man Bottle. It was an experience he richly deserved.

Many thanks for all you did for the Association, Watson. May you rest in peace.

Editor's note: Watson wrote of his wartime experiences in a memoir that ran in the Striking Sixth in seven installments from 2015-2017 and can now be found on our website under Stories (www.sixthmarinedivision.com).

Past President Ed Marsalek Kept the 6MD Association Alive



It's no exaggeration to say that the Sixth Marine Division Association might not exist today if not for Ed Marsalek. While he was a great leader of the Association during his two terms as President, his greatest contribution may have been to get the lineal descendants involved.

Along with Marty Essex, he welcomed the sons and daughters into the Association so they could keep everything running as the core members got older. Not everyone agreed with this idea; some thought the sons and daughters would try to take over and change the character of the organization. But Ed and Marty saw that the lineal descendants only wanted to honor their fathers and help preserve the memory and legacy of the Sixth Marine Division.

Ed was born in Chicago on July 22, 1924. Both of his parents died when he was young, and he was raised by his sister and her husband. He joined the Marine Corps in 1943 and was eventually assigned to 6th Jasco. He was discharged as a Corporal in 1946.

After the war, Ed earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Houston and a law degree from John Marshall Law School. He was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1953 and worked in a small law

firm for a few years.

In 1960 Ed became an Assistant Attorney General and rose to Chief of the Consumer Fraud Division. He helped draft the Illinois Consumer Fraud Act which was signed into law in 1961. Next, he worked as a Deputy Director for the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority. Ed also founded the Marsalek and Lusak law firm where he practiced until he was appointed as Associate Judge in 1986. He later was elected a Full Circuit Judge and was reelected several times.

Ed was a mentor to many new Judges, and he was well respected by his peers. He was a member of many professional organizations and was named Person of the Year by the Chicago Society of the Polish National Alliance in 2016.

In retirement, Ed enjoyed celebrating holidays, birthdays and other events with his family. He was devoted to Ann, his wife of 62 years, and his children and grandchildren, not to mention Frank, a German Shepherd who was constantly by his side. He enjoyed many summers at his second home in Wisconsin with family and friends, and he also loved watching or listening to the Chicago Cubs and Chicago Bears. Ed and Ann traveled throughout the United States and Poland and attended many reunions of the Sixth Marine Division.

We thank Ed for his many contributions to the Association he loved and nourished. Rest in peace.

The Heart of an Army Ranger

REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICES OF BENJAMIN KOPP

by James Freeman, *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2018

The Chicago Tribune reports:

When her son enlisted at 18, many people asked Jill Stephenson, who was a single mother, “How can you let him do that?” But she had known there would be no other route. He was determined. And she was proud of him.

Benjamin Kopp was a “boy’s boy” who played with trucks and dirt and pored over his great-grandfather’s war medals in their Minnesota lake house. The death of his great-grandfather, a World War II veteran, and the September 11 attacks that followed soon after, turned into a mission of grief and vindication for him.

Just one month after graduating from his Minnesota high school in 2006, Kopp headed to Fort Benning in Georgia to begin his training. By 2007 he was in Iraq and after a second deployment there the following year, he arrived in Afghanistan in 2009. On July 10 of that year Cpl. Benjamin Kopp and fellow Army Rangers were involved in a furious battle.

The Minneapolis Star-Tribune reported:

According to a Ranger news release, Kopp’s unit “attacked a Taliban safe haven where they fought a determined enemy from multiple directions for several hours, resulting in the killing of more than 10 Taliban fighters.”

The combat took place in the early morning hours. [Ranger Chaplain Jeff Struecker] said Kopp was leading a machine gun unit that was providing cover for a reconnaissance team that was attempting to make a safe withdrawal. During the exchange of gunfire, Kopp had to emerge from cover and was shot in the leg.

On July 19, 2009 the St. Paul Pioneer-Press reported that he had died from the injuries sustained in combat. According to the Pioneer-Press: “Kopp’s mother, Jill Stephenson, announced her son’s death Saturday night on a CaringBridge.org Web site.”

Stephenson wrote in a journal entry that Kopp died at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C., where he had been in an induced coma and on a ventilator.



Corporal Benjamin Kopp

Kopp had been hit in the popliteal artery behind the knee. He went into surgery in a battalion surgical center, Stephenson wrote, and then went into cardiac arrest due to excessive blood loss. Doctors performed CPR, and he was revived, she said.

He was kept sedated and on a ventilator during surgery to repair the damage to the artery and popliteal vein, she said, but he never woke up...

“Ben had a deep love of country and has just left a legacy of heroism for all of us to cherish,” she wrote.

“Be as proud of him as I was as his mother. I have been blessed for 21 years with a beautiful young man who came to be loved by thousands. I thank God for sharing him with me and for allowing him to die proud.”

He died proud and young. During a speech at Arlington National Cemetery, Ronald Reagan once remarked:

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The Heart of an Army Ranger

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It is, in a way, an odd thing to honor those who died in defense of our country, in defense of us, in wars far away. The imagination plays a trick. We see these soldiers in our mind as old and wise. We see them as something like the Founding Fathers, grave and gray haired. But most of them were boys when they died, and they gave up two lives -- the one they were living and the one they would have lived. When they died, they gave up their chance to be husbands and fathers and grandfathers. They gave up their chance to be revered old men. They gave up everything for our country, for us. And all we can do is remember.

Benjamin Kopp gave up everything for our country, for us. But it turns out that he wasn't nearly done giving. The Minneapolis Star-Tribune noted that more than 700 people gathered at his high school to honor his memory, and for others he left much more than memories.

Before heading into harm's way Kopp had checked a form to donate organs. When asked to specify which ones he wrote, "Any that are needed."

One life was saved immediately. In 2009 the Washington Post reported on the patient:

"How can you have a better heart?" said a grateful Judy Meikle, 57, of Winnetka, Ill., who is still recovering from the surgery. "I have the heart of a 21-year-old Army Ranger war hero beating in me."

Kopp's mother, Jill Stephenson of Rosemount, MN, said that in addition to her son's heart, doctors removed his kidneys,

pancreas and liver for transplant.

"It helps my sorrow; it eases my pain. It really does," Stephenson said. "I know that Ben wanted to help save lives . . . and it really prolongs Ben's life and honors his memory so much and honors me in that we could save other lives."

This week Ms. Stephenson tells the Chicago Tribune that the organ transplants ended up saving three other lives in addition to Ms. Meikle and that her son's donations of bone, skin and tissue helped more than 50 others.

"To experience that joy along with the sorrow, it is a miracle," Stephenson told the Star-Tribune back in 2009.

On Memorial Day we can be grateful for her son, and for all the soldiers like him who have allowed us to live in the miracle called America.



The casket of Corporal Benjamin Kopp of the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, is carried during funeral services, Friday, August 7, 2009, at Arlington National Cemetery

Sixth Marine Division Association

439 Chalfonte Drive, Catonsville, MD 21228



Striking Sixth Newsletter

Spring 2023

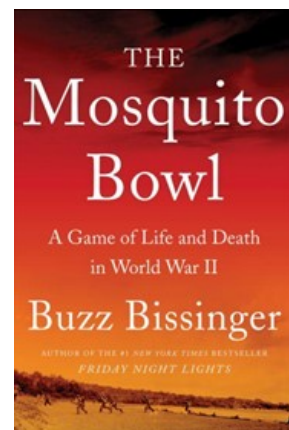
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Buzz is Still Getting Around!



left: Buzz Bissinger and Lester Penny at a book signing in Philadelphia on September 14. Buzz introduced Les to the crowd, and he got a big round of applause.



above: *The Mosquito Bowl*, one of Amazon's top 20 history books of the year.