

Remembering the Fallen

By Sharon Witty
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What do you think of when you hear "Iwo Jima?" Most persons 50 or older think of one of the most famous World War II battles, immortalized by a bronze statue of five American soldiers raising the American flag on that small Japanese island.

Say "Iwo Jima" to persons 49 and younger, and many might remember an event they've read about in history books.

But for Phyllis Williams, 82, of Marshelltown, Iwo Jima was a life changing event for her family. On that far-away island, her 21-year-old brother Harold Lee Shaver, was wounded as he defended his country on the first day the United States Marines invaded, to die of those wounds five days later.

It is fitting during March we give tribute to the men who fought on Iwo Jima, for 2008 is the 63rd anniversary of that battle, which began on February 19, 1945. By March 16, the United States declared the island to be secure, and by March 26, all Japanese resistance had stopped.

Iwo Jima is an island some 660 miles south of Japan, but the United States military wanted to capture the island in order to bring the Pacific campaign to a successful end. Although small, the island was important to both Japan and the United



Harold Shaver

States, for two airfields were located there. Under Japanese control, Japanese fighter planes could attack American bombers on their way to Japan; under American control, American military could use the airfields for emergency landings of damaged planes during these bombing raids.

Iwo Jima was bloody; in the over-one-month long battle, over 21,000 Japanese soldiers lost their lives. Of the American Marines, over 6,000 died and 18,000 were wounded.

On the island is an extinct volcano, Mount Suribachi, rising 550 feet. On the morning of the battle's fourth day, Marines of Company E, 2nd Battalion, slowly climbed up to the top to place a small American flag, raising the spirits of American soldiers. In the afternoon, when the slopes

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were safer, five Marines and one Navy hospital corpsman raised a larger American flag. This sight was immortalized by news-photographer Joe Rosenthal, who later was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the photo.

That photo inspired the 20 ton bronze statue today standing in Washington, D.C. as tribute to all Marines who have given their lives to defend the United States.

The three oldest Shaver kids—Lawrence, Harold and Phyllis—grew up on the family dairy farm near New Providence. “We all helped with the milking. I was milking cows by hand when I was five years old,” commented Phyllis.

Harold was well-known in Hardin County for his farming interests. A Hardin County 4-H member, he exhibited the Grand Champion 4-H heifer at the Waterloo Dairy Congress in 1940.

But the winds of war were wafting to the United States in the early 40’s. “My oldest brother Larry enlisted in the Marines before he graduated from high school—before the United States even entered the war. On the day after graduation in 1940, he had someone drive him to Des Moines so he could join up, without telling our parents he was going.

“Three years later, after I graduated from high school, I married Paul Williams, and then he and Harold enlisted in the Marines. Until Paul was deployed overseas, I followed him.”

Three important men in Phyllis’ life offered themselves to the war effort, as did Phyllis. While following Paul, she lived in Long Beach, California, for one year. There, she and four other New Providence girls, worked in an aircraft factory, “putting wings on C-47’s. It was a rough place.” One day Phyllis saw a man fall forward, dead, because, unknowingly to anyone, a drill entered him from the back.

“When Paul shipped out, I returned to New Providence and lived with my in-laws.”

Reflecting further on her brother, Phyllis explained, “Before the Marines landed on Iwo Jima, a chaplain asked each one what they had they wanted to be returned to loved ones should they not come back. Harold knew what hap-



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pened to the bodies of soldiers who died on ship, for it was Larry’s responsibility to bury bodies at sea.

“Harold asked that he not be buried at sea.”

Harold died on board the hospital ship he’d been taken to after being wounded. “Chaplain Phillip Adams took a lot of time with the ship’s admiral, asking him not to bury Harold at sea. Finally, the admiral consented and said he’d bury Harold at the first island the ship came to.”

So Harold Lee Shaver came to be buried in a military cemetery on the island of Saipan.

Chaplain Phillip Adams had an extraordinary spirit. After Harold Shaver died, Adams wrote a “poem about the young man from an Iowa farm. It was published in the first *Leatherneck*, a monthly magazine about the Marines sent out to Marine families that came out after Harold died.”

Adams didn’t stop there, however. “When the war was over, the chaplain made arrangements for Harold’s body to be exhumed and reburied in the Melbourne cemetery, for our parents had moved to Melbourne by then.”

World War II “wasn’t a fun time, but everyone was in it together. If someone ran out of sugar or had a tire blow out, we helped each other out. That’s why my friends and I don’t understand the attitudes of many people today toward this present war. And put down the President? We would never have done that.”