The Marine I was Supposed to Shake Hands With

Description

Map of Peleliu Island, Palau
Image via Wikipedia

Dropped by the Post Office a few days ago to send off a box. In the parking lot was a car with a Disabled Vet and the USMC logo. The Post Office is small, so it was easy to pick him out, over at the counter with the slips for insurance and the like.

I stepped up and commented â€œSo, youâ€™re the Marine Iâ€™m supposed to shake the hand of!â€• He smiled under his 1st MARDIV ballcap and gave me a nice firm hands shake.

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I asked â€œWhen were you in?â€• and it was the beginning of a 1.5 hour mostly listening session.

His name was Joe and he joined up in 1943 to fight for his country. He was trained as a relief tank driver, but went ashore at Peleliu as an infantry man, since all the tanks had been knocked out on landing.

He lost a lung, and was out of the war. He came home to begin work at the post office, bad had a hard time working in the back rooms due to the dust generated. Will 1/2 your lung capacity, thatâ€™s a problem. He was put at the windows, and the Union guys objectedâ€¦enough they moved him around the area until the heat on the supervisors became too much. He next worked at Squibb Corporation while working on his degree at night school.

While there, one of his supervisors asked if he wanted a wooden chest out of a storeroom that had to be cleaned out. His wife talked him out of bringing it home. He did look at it and in it. It had a brass plate engraved â€œCapt E.R. Squibb.â€• It was full of medicine canisters and surgical tools from a time long past. Turns out it was burned because no one wanted it. Capt Squibb had been a US Navy Medical Officer during the Mexican-American War.

After getting his degree, he found it was time to move along, and ended up at Bulova as the Marketing Manager. He worked for General Omar Bradley, who was the Chairman of the Board. Much of the time we spent talking was about that phase of his life. He was regularly in General Bradleyâ€™s office and worked closely with him. Joe said he never called him by name, always as â€œYoung Man.â€• The stories of the offer to sell Joe the old limo (Joe had 5 children) (once more, his practical Irish wife said no), to the making of the watch presentation cases for the Popeâ€™s visit were but a few of those he shared with me.

It was an enjoyable hour and a half, and hearing little bits of history from a first person reporting viewpoint.

I hope to get more time with Joe one day soon.

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Date Created
May 17, 2010
Author
admin