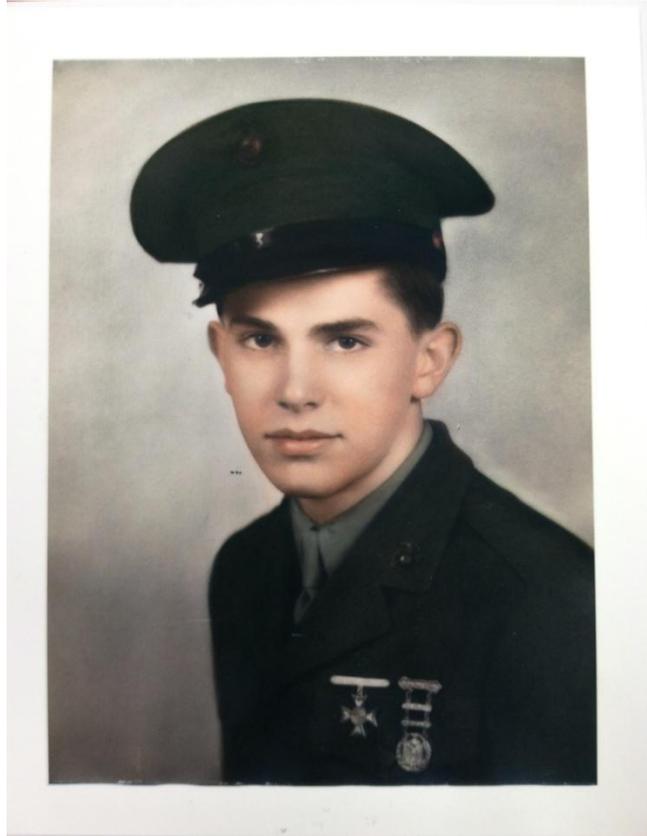


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Dick Whitaker: "It was just another day at the office as far I was concerned."



Having been wounded, Dick Whitaker understands the sacrifices and struggles of war. I had the pleasure of sitting with Mr. Whitaker to discuss his service in the Pacific Theater with the United States Marine Corps, which spanned from 1944 to 1946. He served in battles where the casualty rates were astoundingly high with nonstop fighting for an unbearable 82 days. Despite his bravery and resiliency, he is a man of humble nature who looks back on his service with pride and honor.

After graduating from high school, Dick Whitaker was drafted into the Army, but, because of a series of fortunate events, he ended up in the Marine Corps. Mr. Whitaker was thrown into the rigorous training of Marine Boot Camp conducted at the infamous Parris Island. Despite the grueling conditions, Mr. Whitaker shared some of the humorous stories of his Boot Camp experience, such as a Private's losing his lock box key or someone trying to break his own legs to avoid training. But the overruling truth of Boot Camp was made apparent to Mr. Whitaker when he first read a sign that said, "Let no mother ever say that her son died in action because of lack of training."

Whitaker believes that the camaraderie every Marine shares is founded in the basic technique taught early in training called the Close-Order Drill: "It teaches you to be a part of something that you may have never been part of before: an intricate part of a group of men drilling and turning left-ruff flank and right flank, halt, forward march. You all have to be together. And that was the basic lesson of the Marine Corps: You were all together. And that lasts you through your entire career as a Marine. You identify with the people around you, and you don't want to let them down, and they don't want to let you down." Whitaker explained that ingenuity of Drill Instructors is necessary when preparing a man for war. Every training exercise has a purpose—demanding unity and selflessness—because the standards are high when making a Marine.



At the young age of nineteen, Mr. Whitaker was first introduced to war on the island of Okinawa—"the last Japanese stronghold." "When we went ashore, we didn't fire a shot." Mr. Whitaker said, "I never took my rifle off my shoulder because nothing was going on." The Japanese pulled back and waited for the Allied Forces to attack their fortified bases; on the defense they waited, supplied and ready, for the Marines. Mr. Whitaker's Company was ordered to take Sugar Loaf Hill, a Japanese position that had been assaulted eleven times before. The Japanese were ready. The Marines suffered high casualties. The enemy had artillery and machine guns waiting for them. It was on the retreat from Sugar Loaf Hill that Whitaker was separated from his company. While holding-up a foxhole with a friend, John Senterfitt, Mr. Whitaker was chosen as a target by a Japanese sniper.

John Senterfitt and Whitaker worked diligently digging a foxhole that would protect them during the long and lonely night to come. After making a sufficient foxhole, Mr. Whitaker leaned forward to light his cigarette using Senterfitt's lighter. "Some Jap, a sniper, had been eyeing us, and was probably waiting for us to stop," he explained. The sniper missed Mr. Whitaker's heart, and instead the bullet entered his hand, which held his entrenching tool. Since Mr. Whitaker had come so close to death, many would view his luck as a blessing; however, he saw a different kind of blessing as a result of the wound: "With casualties running at 82% [in the Company], getting a wound like that was a blessing. I got two hot meals. I got to sleep out of the rain, on a cot—pretty nice."

Mr. Whitaker went on to serve as the Company runner under Lieutenant Sherer, who later became Mr. Whitaker's lifelong friend. Dick Whitaker, in a very

humble manner, recalls saving Lt. Sherer from a Japanese soldier who charged Sherer with a grenade in each hand. Mr. Whitaker says, “[I]t wasn’t a big event. When you been in combat for 82 days, every time you kill a Jap you probably save someone’s life... It was just another day at the office as far I was concerned.” However, Lieutenant Sherer viewed things differently, and, upon his departure, he rewarded Mr. Whitaker with a job away from the patrols and ruckus as an orderly.

After the war, Mr. Whitaker reunites yearly with the survivors from his Company. They reminisce about their service and their rewarding lives following the war. Dick Whitaker now lives in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, with his lovely wife, Eileen. Mr. Whitaker is a true patriot, and after hearing his story I have to agree with him in that, “If you’re going to go to war, try and be a Marine!”

