

Irish Brigade Camp #4, Patriotic Instruction, Brother Jerry Redding  
February 2020

## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, WWII Battle of Iwo Jima

The five week-long battle of Iwo Jima occurred near the end of WWII. This was the first battle in the Japanese home islands. Approximately 21,000 Japanese defenders held out against the Marine Corps assault which began on Feb. 19, 1945. This month, February 2020, marks the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of that epic battle.

All but about 200 of the Japanese defenders were killed during the battle, as well as almost 7,000 Marines. American military planners expected the battle to take no more than a few days, but the Japanese defenders utilized the mountainous landscape to conceal artillery and machine gun bunkers and pillboxes that were extremely difficult to neutralize. The American assault was led by legendary Major General Holland "Howlin' Mad" Smith. It was capped by the famous raising of the American flag on Mt. Suribachi which is celebrated in the Marine Corps Monument and stylistically rendered in the soaring Marine Corps Museum.

Twenty-seven Congressional Medals of Honor were awarded to American Marines and Navy sailors during the battle, 15 of which were posthumous. The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration this month at the Museum featured the final surviving Medal of Honor recipient from that battle as the featured speaker: Herschel Woodrow "Woody" Williams. This is the citation read by President Harry S. Truman at Williams' awarding ceremony at the White House in 1945:



The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR  
to

**CORPORAL HERSHEL W. WILLIAMS**  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following 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 First Battalion, Twenty-First Marines, Third Marine*

*Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Island, 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, Corporal 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 flame throwers, struggling back, frequently to the rear of hostile emplacements, to wipe out one position after another. On one occasion he daringly mounted a pillbox to insert the nozzle of his flame thrower through the air vent, kill the occupants and silence 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 strong points encountered by his regiment and aided in enabling his company to reach its' [sic] objective. Corporal Williams' aggressive fighting spirit and valiant devotion to duty throughout this fiercely contested action sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.*

S/ HARRY S. TRUMAN

After the Congressional Medal of Honor ceremony, Williams met with Marine Corps Commandant General Alexander Vandegrift, who had earned the Medal of Honor himself on Guadalcanal two years earlier. The one thing Williams remembered from that meeting was Vandegrift's final comment to him. The Medal was not Williams', Vandegrift told him. It belonged to all the Marines who never made it back home. "Make certain you never tarnish it." He certainly hasn't. He established the Hershel Woody Williams Congressional Medal of Honor Education Foundation, Inc. "to honor Gold Star Families, relatives, and Gold Star Children who have sacrificed a loved one in the service of their country."

