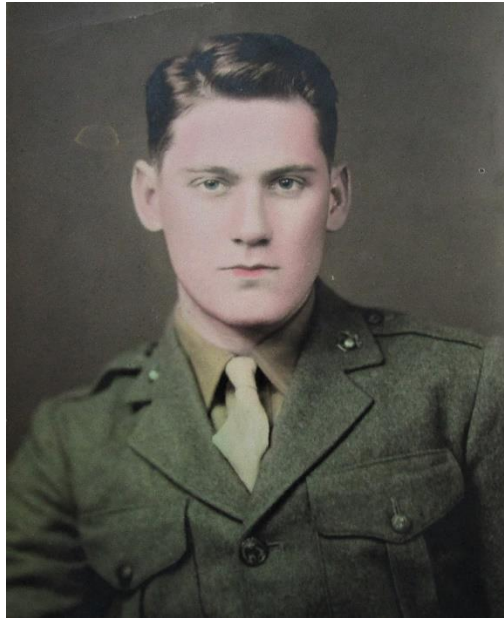
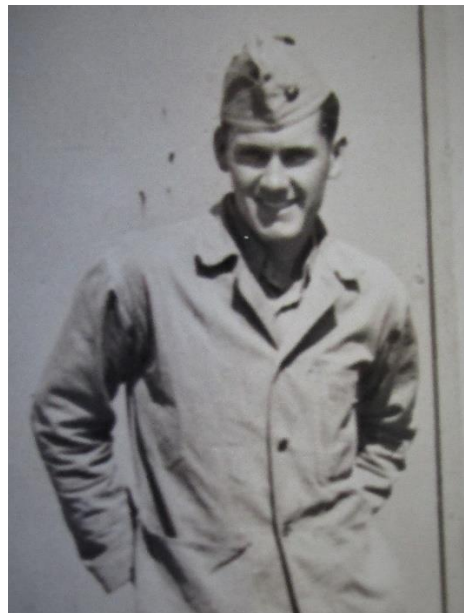


UNCOMMON VALOR WAS A COMMON VIRTUE

Too bad Marshall Blake didn't keep a journal in 1943. He would have recorded a chapter of firsts – first bus, first train, first time out of North Carolina, and first meeting with Parris Island Drill Instructors.



“A buddy who had graduated from Rankin High School with me and I were about to be drafted,” Marshall recalls. “He said those who reported early could choose their service, and that we should go early and choose the Marines.”



I wasn't keen on any of those options, but the recruiter's dress blues sealed the deal. Not too long after that -- and to our chagrin -- a Parris Island DI said it was too late to unseal the deal.”

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After boot camp, Blake moved to Camp Lejeune for field radio operator training, then by troop train to the west coast, and later to the Hawaiian Islands – even more firsts. On Maui Island, he joined a reconnaissance company, 24th Marines, 4th Marine Division.

“As replacements for casualties taken at Saipan and Tinian, we were welcomed at Camp Maui. Our timing could have been better – the division was training for a secret operation.”

The secret operation turned out to be Iwo Jima – the largest amphibious invasion in Marine Corps history – and the deadliest.

“When daylight broke on D-Day, February 19, 1945, I almost felt sorry for the Japanese. I never dreamed the U.S. Navy had that many ships! My radio team lowered our largest pieces of equipment down into a Higgins Boat by ropes, then we climbed down on a rope ladder. The equipment we carried on us weighed more than we did.

It was absolute chaos on the beach, but we lost no time setting up our radio equipment, complete with a hand-crank generator. A gunnery sergeant came by and told us to grab our rifles and come with him. We never got back to our radio equipment.”

Even though Blake did not see the iconic flag raisings on Mount Suribachi on March 23, 1945, he saw something two days later that still throbs in his heart.

“I was hit in the leg by shrapnel from Japanese mortar fire. At the same time, I jerked to the right because I thought I caught a glimpse of something coming towards my head. I was a blessed young man -- another piece of shrapnel came in, but only grazed my cheek and ear.”

Corpsmen treated Blake’s wounds but he refused further treatment. “I didn’t like the looks of the beach hospital. Besides, I wanted to finish the job rather than leaving Iwo Jima on a hospital ship.”

After Iwo was secured, the 4th Marine Division returned to Maui for rest, recuperation and replacements. “We were pretty beat up, but it made us feel good when Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith came for a visit. He was the only general I ever saw, but I saw him up close. As he pinned my purple heart on, he asked where I was from and if I was OK.”

Sometimes known as Howlin Mad Smith, the iconic 62-year old general wasn’t short on quips. When queried about how hard it was on Iwo Jima, he replied, “Of course, it’s hard. That’s why we’re here!”

After Okinawa was secured by other units, the 4th Division started training for the Invasion of Japan – which was made moot by the atomic bomb.

Blake was too short on points to come home when the war ended. “I spent the rest of my time in China with the 6th Marine Division.”

UNCOMMON VALOR WAS A COMMON VIRTUE

When he did return to his Revolution Mill community as a civilian, he was too young to drink alcohol or vote. “Drinking wasn’t an issue with me but voting was – I have never failed to vote since I became of age!”



Perhaps Pauline Pearman thought he was too young. They dated for three years before they were married in 1949. Two sons and three grandchildren were born to the family. Pauline Blake passed away in 2008.

Marshall Blake worked for Western Auto before entering the service and after the war was over. He joined Southern Bell in 1950 and retired 38 years later. He will be 94 years old in April, 2019.

In addition to being an honorary member of the Chapel of Four Chaplains, Blake is a member of the Marine Corps League, American Legion, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The family moved to Summerfield in 1966. They have been long-time members of Summerfield United Methodist Church.

Harry Thetford is a retired Sears store manager and author of “Keep Their Stories Alive” and “Remembered,” a book about 99 former students of Greensboro Senior High School (Grimsley) who were killed during WW II. Contact him at htolharry@gmail.com or 336/707-8922.