

Reflections on a war hero grandfather

Written by By Kenneth Reige Guest Submission
Friday, 21 April 2017 03:51



Wednesday, April 19, 2017 marked the 100th Anniversary of my grandfather Paul Emerson Riege enlisting into the United States Marine Corps to fight during WWI.

With our nation having different events marking the 100th Anniversary of our official involvement in WWI, I am very proud of my family's military history and in the fact that my grandfather served in the most decorated unit in the Marine Corps History – the 1st Battalion/5th Marines or better known as "The Fighting 5th."

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One of (if not the most important) battles that this storied unit (along with my grandfather) fought in is known as the “Battle of Belleau Wood.”

There is a great book out on this battle called “The Miracle at Belleau Wood, The Birthplace of the Modern Marine Corps.” I have shared this story of my grandfather to many of my guests, (especially to Marines) and it is very exciting to hear their stories on how from day one of Marine Corps training they teach them about the Marines of Belleau Wood.

One day when I was telling a young Marine who had fought with the 1/5 in Iraq, my grandfather’s story, he was so excited that he had told me that I was the first direct descendant that he had ever met from the Marines of Belleau Wood. He stated, and I quote: “Your grandfather was a badass and I wish I could have sat down with him, had a beer and just listened to his stories.” It brought a lump to my throat and I simply stated, “So would have I.”

In retrospect, after I joined the Air Force in May 1985, I went to see him in what my grandmother called “The Old Soldiers Home in Dayton, OH.” I decided to wear my full dress blues, and when he saw me he sat straight up in his bed and had the biggest smile.

Before I would talk with him it was yes, and OK, now it was “Yes Sir.” I asked him if he remembered the conversation that we had had four years earlier about him joining the military at a young age, and he said that he did, and I told him “I get it.”

I know we can’t turn back the hands of time, but if possible I would go back to him just to say “Thank You” and “Welcome Home,” and while he was my grandfather he was also my “Brother in Arms.”

By Kenneth Riege

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