

THE OLD BREED – revisited

As a young veteran home from Europe and WW II, I seem to recall reading, “The Old Breed”, history of the First Marine Division –its saga from Guadalcanal to Okinawa in the Pacific, and struck by the large number of Congressional Medal of Honors earned mostly by men falling on enemy grenades to save fellow Marines. Nineteen or so come to mind.

And several years ago I became involved with an organization called: ‘The Three-War Association’, initiated by a retired warrant officer named Frank Durbin in San Mateo, California learning of the inordinate number of men-a book gift from one-who lied about their age to join. One-I still exchange Christmas cards with - is retired Sergeant Major Charles Owens of Lafayette, Georgia who enlisted in the USMC at age fifteen, landing on Peleliu, a ‘mature’ sixteen, joining Chesty Puller, CO, First Marine Regiment in the invasion of Inchon, the Korean War, and served with the Third Marine Division in Vietnam. His was the story of legend.

Last September I was honored as part of Honor Flight II, South Alabama and visited with Louis Holt who was in the 3rd wave at Guadalcanal and later on Peleliu. I paid tribute to Holt in an article describing our trip to Washington DC in the Baldwin Register portion of the Press-Register.

Saturday last, I was honored to be part of the tribute to Sid Phillips and the Gene Sledge family in that historic monument of theater, the Saenger in Mobile. Phillips, the Technical Advisor for the just-released HBO mini-series(The Pacific)drawing from later books by Sledge and Robert Leckie, and his own recall of war with the First Marine Division. I visited with Sid Phillips for a few minutes –I had not met him before-but mentioned Sid and his sister Katherine in articles I had written

about his trek with 'The Old Breed' and Mobile one of the four towns depicted in the Ken Burns epic: "The War". Dr. Sid Phillips, a celebrity, patriot, and still going strong at a young eighty five years was most cordial.

Part One introduced the HBO series with memorable vignettes of Sid and Gene Sledge as kids and fellow Marines, highlighted by interviews of each. Series began by WWII introduction, and Guadalcanal invasion early August of 1942, the first ground attack back against the Japanese...and gave a sequence to come in the battles in Cape Gloucester, Peleliu and Okinawa.

We who fought in Europe had our moments of hell and it left effects on all of us, perhaps none as much as those who fought a fanatical breed of Japanese who died for their Emperor, often refusing capture, and ready to dispatch a prisoner-taking Marine with a suicidal use of a hand-held grenade. Too, the scourge of the tropical jungle wet-lands, a breeding ground of every type of disease carrying bugs and mosquitos and no reprieve from the face to face invasions of islands in their on-going trek.

*Proudly, ironically I gave Phillips a book entitled: "A Trumpet for Freedom", my war experiences inspired by my dedication page where I quote the famous words of General Alexander Vandegrift, commander of the First Marine Division as they embark for Guadalcanal:
"God favors the bold and strong of Heart"*

War and remembrance of the 'Greatest Generation'.