

News and stories

A Grateful Marine Woody Williams Learns Names of Those Who Saved His Life

Oct 27, 2017

Patrick Simon | [TriState Update](#)

SAN DIEGO, CA (WOWK) - For most of his life, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Woody Williams has shown gratitude to two people he didn't even know.

"And I have said many, many, many times, I wore this medal on behalf of them," said the Iwo Jima survivor and West Virginia native.

It was February 23rd, 1945 - the same day the iconic, patriotic image of Marines raising the American flag at Iwo Jima was captured, American forces were getting slaughtered after failing to clear through fierce Japanese front lines. The deeply fortified pill boxes were impenetrable.

Corporal Woody Williams would be their only hope..

"They were depending on it," said Williams' biographer Bryan Rigg. "He was the last flamethrower standing. After two days of battle, his company commander says we need you. So he says I am not going to let down my brother Marines."

The survival rate of flamethrower operators was a ghastly 14

percent. "To ask of woody to do what we needed him to do was basically a death sentence. but we couldn't do nothing," said Rigg.

William's courageous decision would change the course of American history.

"He went in there for four and a half hours - he operated six flamethrowers which are about 100 pounds of gear," described Rigg. "He broke that line of defense. and 1000 guys (the size of a battalion) got moving toward securing the first airfield and strategic purpose of taking the island."

Of the four marines who protected Williams from enemy fire that day, two of them were struck down and killed.

"Those two Marines paid the ultimate sacrifice protecting his life," said Patrick O'Leary - UPS Veteran Affairs Manager. O'Leary had known Williams for eight years as UPS provides free delivery service of granite to Williams' labor of love - memorials across the country honoring Gold Star families of the fallen.

O'Leary heard that Williams never knew the names of those two Marines who saved his life, so he and others sifted through a number of official documents and witness statements. He then set up a special ceremony in San Diego in honor of Gold Star families with a special announcement that would follow.

It was then that Williams would finally learn the two names he has waited over 7 decades to hear.

Corporal Warren Bornholz and PFC Charles Fischer - those two brave Americans who would who gave their lives on that 23rd day of February - were revealed to a very grateful fellow Marine.

I can't say anything to them but I hope spirit-wise so now I can pick up that that my thoughts are with them," a solemn but comforted Williams said.