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## 6th MarDiv Association remembers Battle of Okinawa

10/15/2007 By Lance Cpl. Margaret Hughes , Headquarters Marine Corps  
NORFOLK, Va. —

On April 1, 1945, the 6th Marine Division took part in the Battle of Okinawa, the bloodiest land battle of the Pacific war. The 6th MarDiv succumbed to nearly 1,700 casualties and more than 7,400 were wounded in action. The overall U.S. casualty rate to capture the island was over twice the number at Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal combined.

The Sixth Marine Division Association held their final national reunion with various events Oct. 9-14, here to commemorate the battle they and their fellow Marines so bravely fought over 62 years ago.

The memorial service and wreath laying ceremony on the USS Wisconsin was the first main event of the week. The ceremony began just as the 82-day battle of Okinawa did, with rain.

As the skies wept their tears, it reminded many veterans of the first gruesome 18-days of the assault. Many would consider rain to be a hindrance at a memorial, but to some Marines here it was a fitting way to say goodbye to their fellow brothers.

Rev. Frank J. Mack, the Sixth Marine Division Association's chaplain and ceremony narrator, spoke of the importance for Marines and Americans to carry on the history of WWII.

"The battles we fought will be taught in schools and we will remain in texts books, but it is up to our remaining members and their families and friends to carry on our memories. For when the final flag is folded, WWII will only be a distant memory. We must never forget the gallant warriors we knew," said Mack.

After the final role was called and the muster bell rung for all the association members who have perished over the past few years, members tied ribbons to the ceremony wreath before it was laid into the water.

With the final ribbon tied, the 6th MarDiv wreath was cast over the edge of the ship, and final thoughts and words were said in remembrance. "Bless the brave souls that have given up their tomorrows so we could have our todays," said Mack.

Although the memorial service started off the week-long reunion in a somber mood by paying respects, the following day immortalized these Marines with a dedication ceremony.

The Joint Forces Staff College hosted the association members outside Okinawa Hall library here to dedicate a print of the "The Battle for Sugar Loaf Hill." The print depicts the Marines that courageously gave their lives, nearly 3,000, to secure the well-defended hill on Okinawa that was essential to capture.

Before the dedication ceremony, the association members had a chance to meet Marines attached to 3rd Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Company, whom displayed various weapons, riot gear and a Humvee. The library was also opened to the members with a display of WWII history and an assortment of weapons used during the war.

After the members had a chance to talk with 3rd FAST Marines and tour the library, the print was dedicated to the college. Jeanne McDonnell, the college's chief of staff, accepted the framed print of "The Battle for Sugar Loaf Hill."

"It is an honor to have this picture dedicated to the college and it is a pleasure to hang this piece on the wall in Okinawa Hall," said McDonnell after accepting the print.

Following the dedication, association members and active-duty Marines walked across the street to talk and exchange stories during lunch at Marianas Hall.

At the end of the week, the members had many days to catch up on old memories and make new ones as well. The association concluded this event-filled reunion with a banquet as its final farewell, instilling in the members the effect they had on the Corps.



Norfolk, Va. ♦ Thomas M. Terpinas, a past president of the Sixth Marine Division Association, rings the bell throughout the association's final roll call during its memorial service here Oct. 10 on the USS Wisconsin. The ringing of the bell is a symbolic custom at memorial services that signifies fallen comrades., Lance Cpl. Margaret Hughes, 1/9/2007 7:10 PM

"Although Marines of today may have changed in many ways, one important thing that hasn't changed is the same spirit of sacrifice," said Cmdr. Stephen P. Beyer, the Norfolk Naval Base command chaplain and a reunion guest speaker. "When you ask a Marine why he chose the Marines, the answer 60 years ago is the same as it is today, 'because I want to serve my country.'"

This may be the final national reunion for the association, but the members will forever have a lasting effect on the Marines of today and the Marines of the future. As the knowledge of past wars is carried through each generation, Marines will learn to train better and fight stronger.

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