

What I Learned About Sacrifice and Service from Interviewing a World War II Veteran

By Nick Schroeder

As you sit in your foxhole, you hear your friend scream. Then...there is nothing. You scream for your platoon to find out what's going on. They get over there and find your best friend from all the way back in grade school lying dead; a Japanese soldier is sitting there dead as well. That's when you go crazy. You just can't take it. You bend over and take your friend's dog tag and then you leave. How will you tell his parents? That's when the realization pops into your head. You will tell his parents he died a hero.

Albert "Bud" Gaskin was born August 30, 1914, in Grafton, West Virginia. He served in the Army in 1936 and in the Marines from 1943-46. His highest rank was corporal, and he served in the Field Artillery, 5th Marines. He served in WW II. He served in the Marshall Islands and in Guam. He was later awarded two battle stars and an artillery badge. His special duties included property NCO (non-commissioned officer), the person who kept the gear in shape and, sadly, making crosses for the dead. He was wounded in the left shoulder with shrapnel and hit by lava in the mouth. He was also a bodyguard for Admiral Nimitz. When he returned home, he got on with his life. He went to college on the G.I. Bill and started his life anew, trying to forget his awful months in the war. He now resides in Mechanicsburg where he enjoys writing histories of the areas in which he lived at some point. Bud has lived a long and happy life, and I think he will always know that sense of pride, service, and sacrifice until he meets God at heaven's gate where heroes like Bud belong.

I know Bud because we are members of the same church. He and I met several times this winter to discuss his story. Bud seemed to be happy to talk about his days in the military, especially because he misses his buddies who died in the war; I think that also motivated him to

tell his story. Three lessons Bud taught me about sacrifice and service are these: soldiers' true motivations, the reality of the everyday sacrifices they face, and the challenge of facing death.

Bud taught me about fighting for your country and how he fought so he could live in the world we have today. He also told me he didn't fight for Roosevelt; he fought to get home to his wife and the community in which he lived. He enlisted so he could be with those he considered to be the best, those in the United States Marine Corps. (He knew he would be drafted soon, and he wanted to have a choice.) He said he wanted to be with them because he knew marines trained the hardest and the best, as well as he knew they would be the first to land. He said it was hard to shoot at another person just because they were on the other side. The Japanese were soldiers with families just like he had. It must have been hard to follow orders to kill people with whom you had no personal fight. Bud stayed strong and connected in these times of death and destruction because of mail sent from home. He also talked to his buddies about home, and he tried to remember the good ole' days when there was no war and the world was at peace.

Bud taught me that war is not all glory in battle but perseverance through long hours of discomfort. He brought up everyday sacrifices in which they had to give up small things. Many times Bud and his fellow soldiers would not have enough water or food. He also talked about how he would have to lay in a swamp for long hours when they could neither sleep nor talk. He had to get through those long hours then and when staying up on guard duty. All Bud could do was keep on going until the job was done. The enemy was all around, so he and the others had to deal with that and not make a sound, for they didn't want to get noticed. He also told me about the little items that made his day like when someone made a joke or even shared a funny quote. Also, food was scarce, so they shared it and that's how friendships were made—over a can of

peaches. All in all, our American soldiers had a tough job to get done, and the unit Bud was in got the job done. The everyday sacrifices he and other soldiers made helped win the war.

Bud told me what it's like to stare death right in the face. He told me about how his buddies would lay down their lives so he could live. He said he was willing to do the same for his buddies if it came to that. He taught me about what it means to know the next bullet could have your name on it. He also talked about how one minute you're there and the next you're not. Bud described some of the Japanese army's terrifying combat tactics, such as charging with bayonets with swords held high, screaming, "Banzai!" Sometimes a Japanese soldier pretended to be wounded, and then he killed both himself and the assisting American corpsman with a grenade. The Japanese themselves were very skilled fighters; that's how the Blitzkrieg in the East happened. The dedication of these soldiers to fight to the death had a strong effect on the USMC soldiers. How Bud stayed composed during a time like this with the world as he knew it collapsing around him, is a mystery to me. However, he stayed strong in a time of death and destruction. Perhaps thoughts of home motivated him.

Uncommon valor was a common virtue. –Admiral Nimitz. This is a quote I use now because that's what I think Bud showed while in the service, uncommon valor. Bud taught me a lot about sacrifice and service, but above all he said he would fight again if he had to do so. He would put his life on the line again to secure this country's freedom. I also believe he didn't want to kill people; he just did what needed to be done. Above all, he taught me about sacrifice and service, something every man, woman, and child should know. His willingness to serve and even die in war is what makes his sacrifice and service so great. Everyday military life shaped him and taught him to respect the simple items in life. I am a different person now, because learning

about the sacrifices of Bud and many others has helped me to understand why I shouldn't take little items for granted.