

Here is a short story about a Native American Veteran.

I ran into him in Walmart again this week. He was driving the **handicapped, shopping cart** as he was before. His hair was long and gray. His face was leathery and tattered from years gone past. His long arms were aged from years in the sun. He was smiling broadly when I asked him if he was a real Devil Dog—US Marine. He reached his hand out to shake my hand. I gladly obliged. He is my **Brother in Arms!**

I am not sure he remembered me from our last encounter, but he said he did. I told him I would never forget him. I stood and talked to him for a few minutes as he sat handicapped in the electric shopping cart. Again he shared some of his experiences from **WWII--Saipan**. I nodded in approval as he told his stories, as I held his hand. I told him how important he was to our **freedom**, and he commented he was sure I did a lot more than him. No I did not! He still called me sir. I am smiling as I write about him.

The best part of the meeting with him this time was my two older children were with me along with my two young sons. This encounter prompted some USMC history questions from my 22-year-old daughter. When I explained what happened on some of the WWII Pacific Island Campaigns she was **shocked** to hear how the Marines fought to take those islands. The youth of today have no concept of storming a beach with almost certain death awaiting many, yet the mission had to be accomplished. **Freedom is not FREE.**

Here is the **first story** I wrote last year of this fine **Native American USMC Combat Veteran from WWII** who resides near the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota:

Tonight while I was shopping at Walmart with my two young sons, I see this elderly man in one of those **electric shopping carts** over by the bacon. He is wearing a yellow USMC jacket. So as always if I see someone with something related to the Marine Corps, I have to go talk with them. I walk right over and ask if he is a real **Devil Dog**—Marine, or just likes the jacket? He raised his head to look at me as I stood by his cart. His eyes **lit up** when I said that. He smiled a **huge smile** as he took my hand telling me he “**IS a Marine.**” He very politely asked if I was a Marine too? I showed him where they branded me with an Eagle, Globe and Anchor on my left arm laughing. He shows me a tattoo on his arm, faded from years in the sun. **We are BROTHERS!**

I had never met this man before but when we were talking it was like talking to my best friend in Las Vegas. I had a flood of memories rushing in wanting to share with him, but I wanted to listen to him, so I kept mine to myself. His stories were much more important. **He was a true American Hero!**

He was 90 years old. He fought with the 2nd Marine Division on **Saipan** in 1944 when he was 18 years old. He told of countless battles on the beaches and in the jungles as a young Marine with a rifle and bayonet. **Such courage!** He seemed so excited to be sharing those stories with me. He kept talking as I stood there listening. Often reaching his hand out to mine **over and over again**. Yes, I held his hand, it was an honor.

I stood and talked with him for about 15 minutes. He was so excited to visit about the Marine Corps. He told me he was a private in the infantry on those islands in **WWII**. He said he was not on the first wave to hit the beaches on Saipan, but saw a lot of action when he did reach the island. He was there for about a month with **constant combat daily**. Living in constant fear for a few weeks before they moved on to the next island. But Saipan was his first and he will never forget it.

His mind was sharp. He told me details he remembered about the island campaigns. What it was like being on different waves hitting fortified beachheads. He told me what it was like on mainland Japan after we dropped the “A” bombs. Chaos on the streets! People crying all the time! As young Marines they did not know what to do to help people. It was still a war zone!

It was **great** talking to him. He shook my hand about 5 times and was so excited, as was I. He asked what I did in the Marines. Told him I started off as a private in the infantry and he was like **"me too."** I just smiled and **held his hand** as I shook my head yes.

Such pride for his service in our beloved Corps! Then when I told him I went to OCS and ended up a major **he stood up and saluted me**. I told him I should be saluting him. He laughed. Then he was calling me sir, and I told him my name was **Clay**, and I should be calling him sir. We laughed together.

He told me he was getting old. I told him he looked great and his mind was sharp. He shook my hand again and thanked me for talking to him. He said he was just an old Marine that most people just don't pay any attention to anymore. I told him he was a **National Treasure**. He says “Semper Fi” and we shake hands again before I walk away with something in my eyes. Damn allergies sneak up on a man **as tears ran down my face**.

Our WWII Marines are going away fast. If you meet one take the time to talk to them—listen to them. It is an **enriching experience**. They deserve a heck of a lot more than we have given them.



My young son the photo bomber in the back of our photo.
Godspeed and Always Faithful.