

Allen M. Berge

This is the sixteenth in a series of articles that we hope to publish for years to come. With this series we want to honor Service Members that served our great Nation. As I mentioned in the last article, we need your help to honor these fine Americans. If you have someone you would like us to include, please help us research and develop articles. Our email address is mhamlegionpost113@gmail.com

This article is about Allen M. Berge. Allen was one of the approximately 25 men that left the Mount Horeb area for World War II and did not come home alive. Allen was born 31 December 1919. He grew up in Mount Horeb and like so many others, enlisted in the Marine Corps, on the 8th December 1941 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Allen was a member of the 2nd Marine Division conducting operations in the Pacific Theater. This Division fought some of the fiercest battles on islands the Japanese had reinforced.

Allen fought and died in one of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific Theater on the island of Tarawa. To illustrate my point, I will use PFC Laverne Coulthard's description as Laverne was a member of the 2nd Marine Division at Tarawa as well. In 2014, Laverne wrote the following description of Tarawa: "They left New Zealand on the 1st of November 1943 as part of Task Force 53. The Marines had rehearsed beach landings but had not been told where they were headed. Finally, on the 13th of November the Marines learned that they would be assaulting Tarawa, a small island that held huge strategic importance in the overall plan to end the war against Japan. On 20 November the 2nd Marine Division units disembarked their ships onto Landing Crafts with full packs, rifles, equipment and headed toward Tarawa. Most of these men went ashore with equipment weighing around half their body weight. The landing crafts let them out in water that was nearly waste deep, and they had to wade ashore against an enemy set up to defend the island. Some men were killed as they disembarked the amtracs." As PFC Coulthard continues, he says "he can still remember the roar of the guns, and artillery. The stench of dead bodies by the second day was sickening with daytime temperatures over 100 degrees the sights and smells were plain disgusting."

The Marines won the battle of Tarawa but at a terrible price. Based on the length of the battle and the number injured and killed, the American and Japanese casualties happened every 1.7 seconds. Allen was listed as Missing in Action on the 20th of November and then on the 21st the military listed him as Killed in Action. Many of the Marines killed on Tarawa were buried in hastily prepared graves by their comrades. Unfortunately, the people that came to the island after the Marines left removed markers for the cemeteries. Many of the Marines lost at Tarawa remained there for years, with some of them still there today.

In recent years there have been a number of organizations assisting the United States Government in finding grave sites. Some Marines have been returned to their families. Allen's family has given DNA samples to assist but as of today his remains have not been identified and returned to them.

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In 1952, Allen's parents corresponded with Mrs. Jake Summers from Cotton, TN. Mrs. Summers wrote to say that her son, Velma had been in the battle at Tarawa with Allen and had been injured. She said Velma never talked about the fighting he had seen and that in 1950 he received his last overseas bag and in it was Allen's billfold. He told his parents that Allen was the "best buddy" he ever had. On Tarawa, when Allen was hit, he gave Velma his billfold and told him to keep it and then passed away. Yelma treasured it until he died in 1952. Later in 1952, Mrs. Summers sent the billfold to Allen's parents with a personal letter. As she closed her letter she wrote, "May we all meet some day in the Great Beyond where there no more sorry and heartaches."

Allen Berge has a headstone at West Blue Mounds Cemetery and someday we hope that his body will be returned to his family and interred there.

Let us Never Forget that Freedom is NOT Free

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