

William (Bill) Keithley

This is the twentieth 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

Mount Horeb has such a long history of service and sacrifice to our Great Country. On Memorial Day we hear about men and women who gave their lives in defense of our freedoms, but they are so much more than numbers, they are our brothers and sisters, our friends and family members. This year we are going to talk about another of our young men, William (Bill) Keithley, that went off to World War II at the age of 18 and never came back.

William (Bill) Keithley was born on September 13, 1925, in Angola, Indiana. His family moved to Brodhead, WI and then to Mount Horeb in 1939, in time for Bill to start his freshman year here.

Bill was a vibrant young man, and a good student who got along with everyone. He was involved in numerous activities beyond the classroom as well. He was very athletic and played sports throughout high school. He played football, basketball and baseball, he was elected as the captain of the basketball team his senior year and a pitcher on a very good baseball team. Jack Frame remembers Bill calling him over to warm him up, Jack was an 8th grader so to have Bill call him over to warm him up meant quite a bit to Jack. Bill was a leader, he was a class officer, captain of his team, and an officer for the M Club. Bill was the Junior Class President; he and June Bakken were the Prom King and Queen. As you can see Bill was involved in numerous events throughout his high school career, he was well thought of by everyone.

Bill wanted to enlist in the Marine Corps his junior year like some others were doing. Ralph Buechner had joined the Marine Corps after their junior year and left for the service before their senior year started. Bill's parents however would not sign for him to enlist. When Bill graduated from Mount Horeb High School he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserves and on August 26th, 1943 he was assigned to active duty.

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When Bill completed training, he was assigned to the 3rd Marine Division Ordinance Company where Ralph Buechner served. Ralph has photos of himself with his buddies that were in the unit with him and the historical society has photos of Bill Keithley with the same guys. Bill Keithley had replaced Ralph Buechner on Guadalcanal when Ralph rotated back to the states to help form and train with a new Marine Division.

The 3rd Marine Division continued to fight throughout the Pacific and eventually assaulted Guam to take the island back from the Japanese. On the 21st of July 1944 the 3rd Marine Division was fighting they way across the island. Bill Keithley was carrying ammunition from the beach across the road to an ordinance depot when an enemy shell exploded killing him instantly. Bill was well liked and respected by the men in the unit. As a matter of fact Bill's mother received the following write up on August 15th, 1945:

"My Dear Mrs. Keithley

I am enclosing a photograph of a road within our base camp area which was recently dedicated to the memory of your son as a mark of the admiration and respect felt for him by his own comrades.

I can pay this gallant Marine no higher tribute than to echo the words of the order naming the road, a copy of which I am also sending you. Your son's name will not be forgotten, and his devotion to duty and brave spirit will be an enduring inspiration to Marines everywhere.

Very Sincerely Yours – G.B. Erskine, Major General, US Marine Corps"

Like thousands of other Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines killed in the Pacific during WWII Bill was buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific - Punchbowl Cemetery on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii. A Memorial Service was held at the Methodist Church in town. Mr. and Mrs. Keithley lost a son, June lost a fiancée, and the community of Mount Horeb lost another one of its fine young men in Service to our Great Country.

The family of William Keithley donated to the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society several artifacts and paper items that commemorate his too-short life and commendable service. This collection includes his High School

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Letter signed by his teammates, his High School graduation invitation and program, his Purple Heart, original photographs, moving letters to and from home while he was in the Marine Corps, as well as letters from the Marine Corps to his family. In honor of William Keithley, and in partnership with local American Legion, the Driftless Historium (100 S 2nd St) will display a curated selection of items from the Keithley Collection, as well as a carefully researched timeline of his life. This display will be available free of charge in the Kalscheur Family Foundation Community Education Room during the Historium's open hours (10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., daily) from Saturday, May 25 through Tuesday, June 25, 2019.

Let us Never Forget that Freedom is NOT Free

Compiled by Jerry Hook with Research by Jerry Hook and Kathy Hanna, coordination with the Historium