

Marine Veteran Recalls 'Humor in Combat' over Hot Chocolate on Iwo Jima Anniversary

Preston Cluff sent out the following story published in the Stars & Stripes on February 2019:

Don Graves, 93, who fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945, experienced a lighthearted exchange with the enemy during the fierce, five-week campaign. By CAITLIN DOORNBOS | STARS AND STRIPES Published: February 19, 2019 YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan

On the 74th anniversary of the start of the 1945 Battle of Iwo Jima, a Marine who took part in the pivotal World War II fight shared his story of a lighthearted exchange with the enemy amid the fierce, five-week campaign. Don Graves, 93, was an assault squad leader who traded his flamethrower for an M1 Garand rifle because the Japanese “were hunkered down and they’d come running at night,” the former corporal said in a video the Marine Corps posted to Facebook on Tuesday.

In the video, Graves explained that he’d become squad leader after his predecessor was captured and tortured to death. Soon after taking charge, however, Graves lost his squad. “I was left alone,” he said. Graves found his way to a foxhole with two fellow Marines by the time the battle crept into its fifth week. That’s when an unexpected exchange took place.

After battling for weeks, Graves and his two friends were thirsty for a little comfort. “You know, 18 years old, 17 years old, maybe 19, we never drank coffee we drank hot chocolate,” he said in the video. So, Graves chopped up his D Bar ? chocolate rations from his pack ? poured water over it and lit a fire. “We sat there, and we watched [the fire]...and then, all of a sudden, I smelled hot chocolate,” he said. “It smelled so good.”

But there were more noses in the distance that picked up a whiff of that chocolatey goodness. “I failed to realize that [scent] travels,” Graves said in the video. “And, all of a sudden, a few minutes later, I heard [a Japanese man say], ‘Hey Marine, very good chocoletto. You bring chocoletto here.’” With a smile on his face, Graves said he told the Japanese fighter that if he wanted chocolate, “You come here and get it.” “He said, ‘Oh no, you bring here,’” Graves said, chuckling. “There’s humor in combat. Every man who’s been in combat knows that sometimes funny things happen.”

Ken Kalish replied with a story of his own:

This reminds me of the day our team was out patrolling during one of those you-can't-shoot-them-until-they-shoot-you two boat patrols for some holiday or another. There was a Ba-Muoi-Ba stand set up in friendly territory on a beach where junks often stopped. We figured the people running that stand would have intel to share for both sides, so we pulled in there. We left guys in each boat for cover and bought a beer for each of us. Lots of chatter, but not much intel until we noticed a khaki uniform coming toward us from the bushes. He wasn't armed, so we told our white mouse to keep an eye on the guy. He ordered beer and sat down at a makeshift table a short distance from us. He had perfect English when he asked us how the USC football team was doing. It turned out that he got his MD at USC. My boat's Engineman went back and asked the radio operator at Vinh Long how USC was doing. While he was doing that, the stand owner brought over beer for all of us—compliments of the NVA doctor. He left once he got the USC standings, and we scooted away as well. NVA doctors only traveled with really big units of about a thousand or so. So our intel stop was well worth the gallon or so of sweat we pumped out while on that bit of sand. Didn't get unit IDs, but we had strength numbers to share!