

# Memorial Day 2013

## Mr. Paul Fiore and the Battle of Guadalcanal

### By Ralph Coluntino

Good morning, thank you all for being here today. I would like to share with you a story of one of the single most important battles in our Nation's history, and our local Beverly Farms Hero, 93 year old, Mr. Paul Fiore that fought in the battle at Guadalcanal.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, naval and Air forces of the Empire of Japan, bombed Pearl Harbor. That same day, many of Beverly's own signed up to fight in the war. Among those joining the fight were Mr. Paul Fiore and Mr. Henry Dix. I was recently given the opportunity and the honor to interview Mr. Fiore. I learned a great deal during this interview. Things you don't get to read in books. Things, only those who were there and experienced the death, carnage and horror could understand. He told me of his time on Guadalcanal and the utter destruction, the malaria, the dysentery, the lack of food and the ultimate price that was paid by his fellow Marines. I was overwhelmed when he spoke. I realized that I and all of us, that sleep safely at night as a free people will be in his debt forever. This local hero of Beverly Farms has never looked for accolade or reward. He is a proud Marine. I quote, "I am proud of what I did and I do not regret any of it". He is a proud man, as he should be, a hero, from the Greatest Generation. We are all in the debt of Mr. Fiore and the other 48 million who have fought to defend this great nation since 1776.

Just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, with the majority of the U.S. Pacific Fleet destroyed, and the Japanese advancing throughout the Pacific, the decision was made to throw the Marine divisions into battle as soon as they were filled with men to stop the Japanese assault. The First Marine Division naturally was the first filled, and therefore the first sent out to stop the Japanese advance. The Marines including Mr. Fiore, were sent to New Zealand to await the remainder of their forces, and to receive jungle warfare training. All those who were already enlisted had received their basic training, but in the case of the new Marines, including our local hero of the First Marine Division, they were shipped onto Guadalcanal without any additional training.

11,000 Marines were deployed onto Guadalcanal, while the Navy was under heavy fire from Japanese cruisers. Little food and ammo were landed with them, as they transport ships were running under fire, and forced to withdraw. On the first day after the beach landing, the Marines secured the airfield, later to be named Henderson field after the Commanding Officer of the Marine Scout Bombing Squadron killed during the Battle of Midway. The Marines dug in around an airfield and awaited the Japanese counter attack. They did not wait for long. At a small river, just north of Henderson field, the Japanese tried to cross and surprise the men at the airfield. The Japanese were repelled by the Marines, but the battle dragged on. It took quite a long time for the Americans to secure Guadalcanal, and the cost was unimaginable.

The loss of manpower was so high; the U.S. Department of the Navy did not release the figures for many years, until it was published in the book, *The Old Breed*. Thousands of Marines gallantly gave their lives to stop the Japanese advance, many of them friends and comrades to Mr. Fiore. There is also no account of any U.S. serviceman coming out of Guadalcanal without being wounded. Even with these crushing numbers of dead, Japanese losses were far more severe. As high as American casualties were, over 8,000 Japanese were killed. The rest abandoned the island, showing one of the few times where the Japanese retreated from the Americans.

Mr. Paul Fiore was born in 1920, and grew up here in Beverly Farms. His family came here from Fondi, Italy. When the war broke out, his father said to him: "son, I have made my living in this country. It has kept me safe, and gave me an opportunity to provide for you children. You are going to fight to defend it". Mr. Fiore enlisted at the post office in Boston the next day. Mr. Fiore began in 1942 as a private, and was finally discharged at the rank of staff sergeant. He was wounded several times, including being bayoneted by a Japanese soldier, and taking a bullet wound to the head and that bullet is still lodged in his head today. He was awarded multiple purple hearts, and was honorably discharged from the United States Marine Corps. When he came back from this terrible war, he started a business and a family and he lived his entire life, a proud man.

He was one of the lucky ones.

Henry Dix, Mr. Fiore's childhood friend went to Guadalcanal as well. He was not that lucky. After being wounded by a 50 caliber machine gun, Mr. Dix got back up to keep fighting. He was then shot again, and again he rose. According to Marines with him, the accounts of which were told to Mr. Fiore by fellow Marines, Henry Dix would have been all right if he stayed down, but he kept getting up and fighting on. Why did this man continue to rise, until he could rise no more, and the medics couldn't save him? Why did he rise?

Because he knew the job was not done. He was a Marine.

To anyone able to hear the sound of my voice, please, I beg you; never forget the price that has been paid for our freedom. In our country's history, it has cost nearly 1.3 Million American lives to keep us free.

Young people only know what they are taught. Please teach your children what these great men and women have done for our country. Let us never allow future generations to forget who the real heroes were, like Staff Sergeant Paul Fiore, who helped to make this the Greatest Nation in the world.

Thank you, may God bless you, and may God bless those who have paid the ultimate price for the United States of America.