
RIP LT.COL WARREN BOEGE, USMC WW2

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SURRY, MEâ€“ After a monthâ€™s hospitalization at Togus, Retired United States Marine Corps Lt. Colonel Warren Robert Boege, 89, signed for discharge against medical advice and died June 18, 2010, immediately upon return to his beloved home on the Union Bay.

Warren was born along with a twin sister, Arlene, on December 1, 1920, in Brooklyn, New York. Shortly after, his parents moved the family to Queens Village, Long Island.

Sickly in childhood, Warren often referred to his encounter with â€œthe Angel of Death,â€• at the age of two when, suffering from double pneumonia, he stopped breathing. A mystical, diminutive figure came into his room through an open window, sat on his bent knees and beckoned him to go. Before Warren could respond, his mother rushed into the room and resuscitated him, thus saving his life. Warren later learned that the memory served as a helpful presence. The â€œAngel of Deathâ€• imprinted his life with a gift of foreshadowing and a genius for survival.

These gifts first became apparent in art. Warren won a national poster contest in 1933 when his rendering of a fully dressed, armed, battle ready soldier knelt at the foot of the robed, blindfolded Goddess of Justice weighing scales, the soldier begging for mercy. The poster hung at the Metropolitan Museum. The achievement won Warren a full scholarship to Pratt Institute of Art throughout High School and for a two year college degree in Commercial Illustration.

His father, Alsatian, of combined French and German ancestry, sensed that war was imminent and in an effort to protect Warren, pulled strings to get Warren a position at the Brooklyn Navy Yard as an Engineering draftsman in ordinance design. Since Warren had no training in draftsmanship, the draftsmen at the Navy Yard took him under their wing and Warren received a promotion and a raise.

Thus secured for the future, he was at home with his parents on Sunday afternoon, December 7, 1941 when the news of

Pearl Harbor came over the radio. The following day Warren and his best friend enlisted together for officer training.

During his pre-flight and early flight training, because of numerous incidents of being a "bad boy," Warren placed himself perilously close to being discharged or, in some instances, near death. His record reads that he was "unregimentable" and "poor officer material." "I was always marching off my demerits," he said.

Warren advanced in aviation, however, and at Pensacola Naval Air Station received his officer commission on April 28, 1943. Because he was preeminent in gunnery, the Navy placed cameras in his wings. He described himself as aghast watching a training film and at the end finding his name as the pilot in the credits. Because of his super eminent gunnery record, he was conscripted into the Marine Corps. "Normally you have to volunteer to die," Warren said.

One fateful day, as leader on a training drill off the coast of Florida, the squadron encountered an Army airplane. It was common practice for Marine Corps pilots to engage Army planes in mock dog fights. So Warren radioed his wing man to take over and kissed his squadron goodbye. He described pulling up alongside the Army airplane and signaling the pilot for a round, but the pilot took no notice and stared fixedly ahead. His reaction only spurred Warren on.

Warren made high side S runs, low side S runs, flew directly under, over and finally brought his plane into a slow roll directly in front of the Army aircraft, creating prop wash. Once more he pulled alongside the pilot to get a reaction, but the pilot "took no evasive action." Warren concluded he was a "chicken," (expletive deleted) and returned to base.

A few days later, two MPs took Warren from under each arm to the Command Post. The Commander was holding a letter, shouting unmentionables, and turning shades of red and purple with rage. He flung the letter at Warren, which landed at his feet, and before Warren could pick it up, he noted the Pentagon's letterhead.

The letter was from Admiral Earnest J. King, Supreme Commander of the South Pacific, who described being flown to a secret meeting in the Bahamas, when the plot of the Wildcat, Fox-49, "made numerous passes, all of which came dangerously close." Further, the letter stated that this pilot was "temperamentally unfit and mentally unadapted for control of an aircraft." To conclude Warren should await further orders.

Before the news came, Warren was assigned mail delivery on the coast. Also he performed test runs for performance checks on aircraft instrumentation at high altitudes and while in terminal velocity dives. Warren described the effects of oxygen deprivation as mind altering, experiences akin to his encounter the "Angel of Death."

Then the letter arrived. Warren was grounded and sent to Officer Indoctrination in Infantry at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia. After completion of this, where he learned to shout orders across the length of a football field, a trait which became legendary throughout his life, he was sent to Treasure Island, off the California coast, to await his assignment.

The Chief Petty Officer delivering the news greeted Warren in a grandfatherly way. He first asked, in not so many words, "What did you do kid, have an affair with the Admiral's wife?" He showed Warren an RBZ radio, gear with an antenna sticking up from a strap across the chest. Warren's job would be as a forward observer with JASCO, the Joint Assault Signal Company, to site targets to communicate to the pilots. "You'll be going in with the first wave," the antenna maker told him, "you'll have a life expectancy of 12 seconds."

An officer does not have the solace of camaraderie with the enlisted men. Moreover, unlike Warren, most were unprepared for the magnitude of the peril they faced. Warren described his plight: "the mortars came directly at me, but all those around me were killed or lost limbs and died from their wounds."

Advancing in a crawl on the beach on Saipan, a fellow officer warned Warren that the concussion from the exploding mortars could kill them and that they should keep their chests off the ground. While Warren dug his elbows into the sand to prop himself up, he remembered having the thought, "I can not let him (Admiral King) do this to me."

His determination, plus a growing camaraderie with the pilots he came to know through radio communications, shaped a confidence so astonishing that later, on Tinian, someone observed Warren assist corpsmen under heavy fire. Warren himself was wounded but did not report it. And his humility prevented him from ever fully describing the heroics that reached the Commanding General of the 4th Marine Division, Clifton B. Cates, who awarded Warren a field citation. "Is there anything I can do for you lad?" Such was the gentle way superior officers addressed their juniors. Meekly, Warren asked, "Can I have my flight orders back?"

This objective had been with Warren since Quantico. Every month he would go for a physical and psychiatric evaluation and send a letter to Marine headquarters. "Not Approved," "Permission Denied," read the responses.

The General in charge of Marine Aviation was a three star General. On the uniformed Clifton B. Cates, Warren immediately noted four stars. "Rank has its privileges," Warren surmised and after regaling the General and his Executive Officers with his story, General Cates overrode the Marine headquarters disapproval.

Warren believes that he was the only pilot in the history of Marine Aviation to get his flight orders back and had he not done so, surely he would not have survived as a forward observer in his next mission on the ground.

That mission being Iwo Jima, the Marine Corps determined that Warren, with his observation experience, and because of the established rapport with the pilots, should be trained for the grasshopper squadron called VMO for Combat Military Observation. He was trained at Kahului Naval Air Station on the Hawaiian Island of Maui for what would be a solo flight.

Given a pair of coordinates, he set out in a plane he painted with the face of a buzzard, dubbed "Boege's Buzzard." Cates flew over the Pacific with the hope that the vector he was on was established with accuracy.

Upon sighting Mt. Suribachi he saw that the main landing strip was under heavy fire, so he landed on an open area pitted with the holes from the initial aerial bombardment. Again this was a move that saved him. On landing, his plane was destroyed by machine gun fire, hit inches from the cockpit from which Warren dove into a hole where he stayed for a day and a night until the rest of the grasshopper squadron landed.

On Iwo Jima, Warren logged more flight hours than any observation pilot. Perhaps in an effort to regain and make use of his fighter pilot training, he asked the maintenance crew to affix rockets beneath his wings, firing them by a toggle switch the mechanics rigged for him. Warren also fired tracers from the cockpit with his .45 and .38. While firing tracers pointed out enemy positions, they also traced a direct line back to Warren, but being a target was a position he had already grown accustomed to.

Warren's firing from his cockpit directed the aim of the big guns from the destroyers off shore for direct hits into the pill boxes and caves, an act that was pivotal in the success of taking Iwo Jima.

The din in the cockpit drowned out the sounds of victory from below. Warren's heart swelled with pride as he flew over and watched from above. "Enemy fire came in at this angle," he explained, making an arc with one arm. "Our return came at a lower angle," he gestured lower. "I was able to fly right through the middle and watch them raise the flag." Even humble, he said, "I don't want to over do it, but my heart," he trailed off, his eyes welling with tears.

As a child, before taking up art, his most ardent desire was to fly, expressed in the building of model planes. As a young artist, he expressed feelings about war and the aftermath he would experience before he was conscious he would become the battle ready and later shell shocked Marine.

And his gift of foreshadowing revealed itself again when he received the Distinguished Flying Cross, awarded to him at the place from which he left behind his secure, salaried job as an imposter draftsman at the Brooklyn Navy Yard:

"For extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight on IWO JIMA, VOLCANO ISLANDS, from 19 February to 16 March, 1945. During this period Lieutenant BOEGE flew his slow and unarmored aircraft over hostile lines in the face of antiaircraft and small arms fire. Though his plane was often struck by enemy fire, he continued to fly at low altitudes effectively directing artillery and mortar fire on enemy targets, thereby aiding materially in the destruction of important enemy installations. The skillful maneuvering of his aircraft enabled him to successfully complete twenty-four missions without injury to himself or his observer. His skill and devotion to duty were in keeping the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

ROY S. GEIGER, Lt Gen USMC

After the war, the recurring theme of Warren's life: completion, lead him into a career in Commercial Illustration as an Art Director. Later, he returned to a career as a flight instructor and owned a flight school, logging 50,000 hours as an instructor. Remarrying in later life was a miraculous fulfillment, a union which brought him full circle back to Maui, to the place where General Clifton B. Cates, JASCO, the battles of Saipan, Tinian, Iwo Jima, the VMO Squadron and all the efforts of the 4th Marine Division are memorialized.

It was our goal together to verify through historical military documentation that Warren believes his was the first plane to land on Iwo Jima; he was the only pilot to get his flight orders back, the only officer of his regiment to survive and he remembered documentation stating he was not only the only pilot of an observation plane awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, but commended for heroism in doing so.

However, battles with health became overwhelming and issues pertaining to untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder became more stress than his heart could continue to bear.

Yet, returning home was his final completion. His home Warren enshrined his "Aerie," where a placard under magnificent statues commemorating the Marine Corps emblem proclaims, "The Eagle has Landed."

Even in death, Warren came full circle. Death was indeed an Angel, as I was with him as he wanted, and in the same attempt to resuscitate him as his mother did. This time, carried on the wind of my breath, he took to his final flight.

The eagle has landed and is now free.