

Program: A Return to Iwo Jima

Speaker: James Baize, BSME, BSNE, Sciencetech Club member

Introduced by: Jeff Rasley, Sciencetech President

Attendance: 106

Guests: Clarisse Hawley, Rodney Mail, Robert Tanquist, Frances Whitener

Scribe: Don Mink

Editor: Carl Warner

Jim Baize was introduced as a Phi Beta Kappa (Purdue) and, in 1969, as the best dressed man in Indiana. He has a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Northwestern University and a degree in Nuclear Engineering from Purdue University. He worked for the Allison division of General Motors until 1959, when he started his own engineering firm.

Jim quit school at thirteen, and, after working for Western Union, in 1943 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy when he was 15 years old. He had a friend claim to be his father and affirm that Jim was seventeen so he could enlist. Jim was sent to boot camp (Naval Station Great Lakes) and then to Marine Corp Base Camp, Pendleton, California to learn how to operate landing craft for the Navy. He became a coxswain, the driver of the landing craft.

He drove landing craft delivering Marines to the shores of Saipan, Tinian and Guam. He was injured at Guam and returned to the fleet after his recovery. In February, 1945, he was sent with the fleet to drive a landing craft in the invasion of Iwo Jima.

In early February 1945, Jim and the fleet arrived at Iwo Jima. There were 22,000 Japanese soldiers dug in with 1421 pillboxes connected by tunnels. The bombardment by aircraft and naval guns did not dislodge them.

Jim drove his landing craft toward the beach, dodging disabled and smashed craft. Seventy thousand U.S. troops made up the landing force. Over 8,000 were killed and over 16,000 wounded. Twenty yards from the beach, Jim's landing craft was destroyed by the shelling. Many other boats were also hit. The other three crewmen with him died along with 38 Marines. Jim was pulled to shore by a Marine and given morphine. His injured back and leg were supported by belts tied around him. Other gear from deceased Marines was given to him, and he learned to fight on the job like a Marine. Jim said it took six months to learn to be a sailor, and one hour to be a Marine.

The Americans were easy targets; stuck on the beach with volcanic sand so loose and deep, it was impossible to dig foxholes. Their training and motivation carried the day. With flame throwers and grenades they cleared pill box after pill box. The Marines then moved out of the beach and took more and more of the island. The battle, including American and Japanese troops, had a "density" of 11,000 troops per 1 square mile.

The island was eventually taken by the U.S. One of the most famous photos of WWII was the raising of the large U.S. flag on Mount Suribachi. It was actually the second U.S. flag raised there, and photographer Joe Rosenthal's snapshot was used to sell war bonds.

Jim was introduced to speaking about the war as therapy. An introductory slide encouraged retrieving stories from Veterans by a donation to the “Lest They Be Forgotten” Memorial Fund.



James Baize