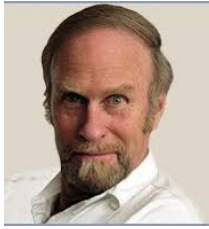


# My Father: A United States Marine



By Frosty Wooldridge

May 26, 2025

Most American kids today take their freedoms for granted. Most don't possess a clue as to the "Greatest Generation" that saved the world from Nazi aggression in World War II. Most bury themselves in their "Smart Phones" while our society moves at frenetic speed to a destination none of us really understand.

My father, M/Sgt Howard Wooldridge, born in Reed City, Michigan, 1918, joined the Marine Corps immediately after December 7, 1941. He gave up his baseball scholarship to Western Michigan University. Hitler, Japan, and that "War to End All Wars" stole my father's youth, his scholarship, his education and his life. He punched through Marine Corps Boot Camp training to become an Infantryman heading to the South Pacific.

You might not know where the term "Infantry" originated. The Romans always thrust the youngest kids, the "Infants", onto the front lines to be killed in battle. That's how the word "Infantry" entered the world. It hasn't changed to this day...old men start wars that kill young men by the thousands, and into the millions.

A perfect example stems from Russia's 70 year old Vladimir Putin having killed over 200,000 kids on both sides of the Ukraine War that Putin started. If you look back at WWII,

Hitler caused the deaths of over 70 million kids from the ages of 15 to 21. Same with the Vietnam War where 58,479 American "infants" died in Robert McNamara's and Lyndon Johnson's war that slaughtered 2.3 million Vietnamese. What did the Vietnam War accomplish? Answer: nothing but death.

Okay, my father fought in the South Pacific in some of the deadliest fighting against the entrenched Japanese in Iwo Jima. We're talking about blood, guts, mangled bodies, horrific emotional trauma, thousands died, and many that survived—never recovered their minds or emotions.

Somehow, and this is a fact, it doesn't matter how smart, strong, fast, tall, short, or educated you are in a war—if a bullet or bomb has your name on it, you're off the planet in an instant. As the "luck of the draw" would have it, my father survived combat. I can tell you this: it's nothing like it is in the movies. "Saving Private Ryan...Band of Brothers...Fury" and other war movies give you a taste of sheer misery, pain and sorrow of war—but they can never give you the sheer horror of what a soldier feels when he's a face to face with death.

If you notice, those movies never give you a taste of what it's like to kill another human being. If you have any humanity in your being, how do you process killing another person?

I remember my own U.S. Army Fort Benning, Georgia Boot Camp in 1968. Sgt. Pierce screamed at us, "What is the bayonet fighter's call?" We screamed back, "To kill, drill sergeant", as we stabbed the dummies in front of us. During boot camp, we learned to take orders, shoot our rifles into enemy ranks in order to kill as many of the "gooks" as possible.

As we marched with our 35 pound packs in Georgia's 105 degree heat, we sang, "I wanna' go to Vietnam, I wanna' fight the Vietcong...I wanna' go see Ho Chi Minh, to pull the whisker's on his chin...sound off 1,2 sound off 3,4, sound off 1,2,3,4...."

During night maneuvers, we crawled under concertino wire while live bullets and tracers fired four feet over our heads. With your rifle across your forearms, you hug the dirt, praying that you won't die. All the while, the drill sergeants called us, "Maggots, scum buzzards" and other unsavory names. If you made a mistake in the ranks, "Drop for 50 Wooldridge!" "Yes, drill sergeant." (Pushups)

For certain, when I survived Boot Camp, I figured I was a dead man walking because I knew I would be shipped out to Vietnam.

Why is that? If you and I ever meet, and you shake my hand, you will notice a gold peace ring on my right pinky. My college roommate, who was drafted right out of our room, stopped by to see me before he shipped out to Vietnam as an Infantryman. He said, "Frosty, I bought this peace ring for you. If I get back, we'll go drink a beer and laugh about it. If I don't get back, wear this ring and be a man of peace the rest of your life." The Vietcong killed him in a firefight within three months in Vietnam. I've worn that peace ring on my pinky since 1968. He's traveled all over the world with me...his memory lives with me as an "infant" that never got to live his life. When I visit The Vietnam Wall in Washington DC, I place my hand on his name and cry my guts out. Now you know why I vomit at the thought of McNamara, Lyndon Johnson and General Westmoreland.

So, my Dad returned from WWII. For his reasons, he remained in the Marine Corps. I became a service B.R.A.T. Many think that service kids are "Brats." Instead, it stands for "British Regiment Attached Traveler." In other words, my brothers, sister and I were "dependents." We traveled every three years to new duty stations in the USA and abroad. By the time I was 18, I had seen most of the USA.

With each new duty station, my father started baseball leagues, football leagues, umpired ball games, wrote up the games in the sports pages, and even was awarded a citation

from a Marine general for my Dad's work with youth. He brought up all five of us to become decent, educated, athletic and contributing citizens of America. We stood for the flag on base at the sound of taps, attended church, and did our best on the athletic fields. I can tell you that I am PROUD to be the son of a United States Marine. He and my mother brought all of us kids up to be good American citizens. We've all made our parents proud.

But then, while serving our country at Camp Lejeune, my father died umpiring a baseball game at the youthful age of 46. He was lean, in shape and full of life. All I can say is that I've loved him with all my heart six decades later. He still inspires me. I know he's looking down on his kids and he's very proud.

At the funeral, the preacher said, "In this society of ours, we have come to expect a person to get in bad health and approach the door of death slowly and painfully. We expect the end to come this way so that we can prepare ourselves for it—whether it be us or someone close.

"It always comes as a shock when someone apparently in good health and endowed with boundless energy passes on to his reward swiftly, quietly and painlessly.

"Such was the case for M/Sgt Howard Wooldridge. One day you see him at work, the next day at the bank, and the next day you read about it in the newspapers.

"If it is in-comprehensible to us, mere friends, it must be especially difficult for the family. More so for Wooldridge's family more than the ordinary family.

"He was an athlete and reared a family of athletes. In earlier years he was a participant as well as a coach and leader in sports wherever he went. Later, he stuck to coaching and officiating, and left the participation to his fine array of athletic sons—Frosty, Rex, Howard and John.

“To an active man, nothing in this world can be more rewarding than a son. With four of them, Wooldridge could have known little but happiness. He watched them grow, encouraged their endeavors, and suffered their defeats side by side.

“In his passing, it may be difficult to find the grit to regroup and advance. But, in sons and friends, Wooldridge left the hard core of aggressiveness and the will to win.

“The human body lasts less than a century; a man’s achievements, good and bad, endure to infinity. This, then is the end result of fatherhood and friendship--memories that survive the ages. In the eyes of the people that knew him, he shall remain and man of limitless courage, iron determination and a monumental sense of humor and compassion.”

God bless you Dad! Semper Fi from your sons. And God bless the United States Marine Corps. The very best to every man and woman who has served America from Valley Forge to the Middle East.

© 2025 Frosty Wooldridge – All Rights Reserved

E-Mail Frosty: [frostyw@juno.com](mailto:frostyw@juno.com)