

## Jim Baize: One Man's War

At the June monthly *Gathering of Men* breakfast, Jim Baize, a Meridian Street Church member and World War II veteran, helped the men and women in attendance honor and remember those who served in the military. Jim served in the Pacific Theater and fought on Iwo Jima. Jim reportedly is the only Navy Shipman to have fought on the Island in hand to hand combat. Jim engaged the breakfast group with a multimedia presentation of his story entitled, "One Man's War."

Jim has a unique story, like all who served. Jim was raised by his grandparents and does not know what happened to his parents. His grandparents did not talk about it. At the age of thirteen his grandmother died and Jim was left in the care of his grandfather and uncle. That did not last long: Jim left the house and got a job as a bicycle delivery person for Western Union paying two dollars a week. He got a room in downtown Indianapolis for twenty-five cents a week and after paying a dollar a week for the bicycle, Jim was in business. That did not last long, either. Three weeks later the truant office found him and took him home. Jim left home again, and again...and again.

A couple years later he tried to join the military and serve in World War II. Due to his age, Jim was told enlisting required his father's permission. Jim did not know anything about his father and this did not stop him; he found a man who would say he was his father. It worked; Jim enlisted and was back in business!

Jim joined the Navy and served as a Coxswain driving a Higgins Boat, an amphibious boat driver. Jim went aboard the USS Freemont and landed first on Saipan. Jim was hit on Saipan and got everyone in and made three trips out. After time in the hospital, Jim served safely in Tinian prior to landing on Iwo Jima.

Jim drove LCVP number 13. His boat and the 38 men aboard were in the second wave landing on Iwo Jima. Jim's boat, number thirteen, was blown up, as were all the men and crew. Jim made it to shore. He was given a rifle by a Marine named Jack and was told: "you're a Marine, now!", and as Jim put it: "It took me six weeks of training to be a Sailor and one hour on shore to become a Marine!"

Jim continued engaging the Gathering with stories of Iwo Jima and the fighting he encountered as he fought with three broken vertebrae. Jim knocked out a pill box and was present for the immortalized flag planting.

Jim's connection to God and faith is stronger today than when he served. For many years after WWII Jim faced "Why God" questions. "Why is war as it is?" "Why are men and women selected?" "Why would God allow horrors like Iwo Jima, the bloodiest assault in US Marine History, to happen?" It was after working on these questions for fifty years that God presented a way for Jim to achieve closure: telling his story. Jim now speaks all over the country. He feels proud of the kids he speaks to. According to Jim, "they are interested, concerned and ask good questions." That came six years ago and as Jim is one of less than 100 Iwo Jima veterans alive today, Meridian Street and our faith community is blessed by his service and stories.