

"Okinawa Mud"



from Tom Martin's Blog "View from the Hill (Why Sunsets Matter)"

I suppose there's been better gifts, but can't remember when. Okinawa veteran Bill Hill drove down from Indianapolis to meet the son of One of His Own - a WWII Deadeye. We were able to chat as I vicariously relived Dad's footsteps through the eyes of this grizzled 82 yr old veteran who fought alongside Dad's battle weary 383rd, with the 382nd infantry.

I studied the contents of the bag which appeared to be dried dirt, parched with age.

"That's Okinawa mud. I collected it on my return to Kochi Ridge several years ago--a place where your Dad and I saw so many of our friends fall. It's the best gift I could think to bring to you--the most precious gift I can offer."

And so it was.

Bill brought along a canteen he picked up off a dead Japanese soldier. No cork was available, so instead, the cap was carved out of a piece of wood. Dried blood stains covered the strap, a testament to the ferocity of the fighting.

We enjoyed a long talk with lunch, and I admit, my ego was swelled a bit when Bill complimented me on the stories I'd sent to his 96th Deadeye website

"I've read a lot of stuff over the years, especially on WWII and Okinawa in particular. Your stories are heartfelt and of high quality, written with integrity. Your sense of empathy and insight into the old veterans of the Pacific War, especially Okinawa veterans like your Dad and me, make good reading."

Bill's kind words made the effort all the more worthwhile. And I've reaped the added benefit of some of that Okinawa mud taken off Kochi Ridge. I'll take extra care in protecting it for safekeeping for future generations.