



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Thirty-one Baytown Junior School Pre-AP Language Arts students of Sheryl Ferguson surround Iwo Jima survivor Gordon Trott and Iwo Jima expert Mike Files, who made Iwo Jima history come alive for the students during presentations on Feb. 22. The students and huest speakers are flanked by assistant principal Geri Borel and Mrs. Ferguson on the left, and Principal Michael Wahl and assistant Principal David Yepez on the right.

Sands of Iwo Jima come to Baytown Junior

Feb. 23, 2011 was the 66th anniversary of the historic U.S. flag-raising atop Japan's Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II.

That celebratory image belied the bloody struggle ahead.

After the flag-raising, it took a month for U.S. troops to wipe out the Japanese resistance of 22,000 defenders, who were expertly dug in. (Only 1,100 of survived.)

On Feb. 22, 2011, the day before the anniversary of one of the most memorable photographic images of World War II, 31 Baytown Junior sixth-graders got to meet one of the heroes of that bloody campaign: 85-year-old Gordon Trott.

A U.S. Marine Corp radioman serving in the 5th Marine Division, Trott was 19 when he hit the sands of Iwo Jima.

For more than an hour, the Pre-AP Language Arts students of Baytown Junior School teacher Sheryl Ferguson listened to Trott talk about the 36-day assault of the small island where the fighting was ferocious, often at close range with small arms, machine guns, grenades, mortars and flamethrowers.

"They shot everything they could at us," he said, his voice is still steady and his mind clear about those days 66 years ago.

Trott recalled during the fighting how a sniper chased him into his foxhole, which, by luck, also saved his life from a mortar shelled that exploded nearby.

He talked about being bombarded all night, and on one morning, finding an unexploded mortar at his feet in the foxhole.

"The Lord watched over me," he said.

Trott was injured in the fighting, but pressed on. Only last year had some shrapnel removed from his head.

Trott earned too many medals to remember — USMC Sharpshooter Rifle Badge, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, WWII Victory Medal and many, many more. He has given away most of them to family members.

After his military service, Trott was a printer for 42 years.

Trott, along with guest speaker and Iwo Jima expert Mike Files, made Iwo Jima history come alive for the students.

Files detailed his experiences visiting the island last year for the annual commemoration of the battle.

Files, a retired hospital administrator, has been interested in WWII history for the past 40 years and has studied and visited many of the islands in the South Pacific.

Having just read "Code Talkers," a novel about the Navajo Marines of WWII who developed and implemented a secret code that helped us win the war, Mrs. Ferguson wanted her students to realize that literature and history go hand-in-hand. "You must know the historical context, or what was going on in the world during the setting of the story, to fully understand and appreciate the literature. The world does not divide itself into different subjects—they're all related" said Ferguson.

Students were captivated by Files' interactive presentation where they drew simple maps on the board showing the location and progression of the war as he explained it. They were privileged to see an original 1945 newspaper with the full-page, now world-famous, picture of the Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima and hear stories about the men. Clips from a video showing the many underground tunnels on the island, pictures of soldiers on the shore, and other memorabilia were shared with the class as well.

After the presentation, Trott presented each student a small packet of the famous black sand of Iwo Jima.

"We thank people like Gordon Trott and Mike Files who take the time to enrich our students' lives with their valuable experiences and who make the events of history much more real and relevant," said Mrs. Ferguson.

Iwo Jima was the second-to-last stop for the U.S. in its goal of total victory against Japan in World War II.

For Trott, the truth is winning World War II was important.

"It was a job, and it had to get done," he said.



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