

Bio of Solomon Blechman by Bryan Mark Rigg

Correspondent and Staff Sergeant Solomon Israel Blechman (son of Rabbi Nathan Blechman of Mamaroneck, NY), was born in New York City on 26 January 1921. His father had worked on the Jewish Welfare Board concerning military hospitals and was also part of the Jewish Theological Seminary which is the main educational organization for Conservative Judaism. So, Solomon was raised with an understanding that having a strong military, strong educational institutions and a strong faith community in one's country was very important.

Solomon joined the Marine Corps in the summer of 1942 right after he had graduated from Union College in May. By the summer of 1943, he was promoted to Staff Sergeant which was an explosive climb through the ranks (Private, Private First Class, Corporal, Sergeant, Staff Sergeant). Many people would require years to do this, yet he did this in a year showing his strength of character and intelligence (also having a college education helped him tremendously). Some clear evidence that this guy was a thinking Marine, as he traveled through the Pacific, along with all his combat gear that he carried with him to fight the enemy, he also had the following books on his person: "Emerson's poems," "The Picture of Dorian Gray," "Festival Synagogue Service," "Vanity Fair," "Mother Russia," "Marines and Others," "Tristan Shandy," "Holy Scriptures for Jewish Soldiers," and "Jewish Prayer." He showed that the ultimate weapon is an educated mind and he loved reading (evidence by the fact he added probably 10-15 pounds of books to his pile of 70 pounds of combat gear that he had to lug around during marches, drills, deployments).

Unfortunately, his first taste of combat was his last. He landed on the first day of the liberation of Guam on 21 July 1944. For hours, he did his best as a correspondent to cover all the units in the front lines to make sure he got the stories correct being hit by shrapnel and machinegun fire in his abdomen. He initially survived the wounds and did not want to leave his comrades, but was forced to seek aid by his officer and was taken to the ship USS DuPage APA-41. Sadly, he died soon thereafter and was buried at sea in Apra Harbor. He would receive the Bronze Star with V for his bravery receiving the rare endorsements for the lowest medal for valor from the likes of Commandant Vandegrift, Fleet Admiral Nimitz and Major General Harry Schmidt (the most highly endorsed Bronze Star this study has documented). It was indeed a "special award" for a correspondent. His citation read in part:

Fearlessly making his way forward among the forces who were blasting the enemy's formidable defenses in an advance over the perilously rugged terrain, he repeatedly exposed himself to the devastating Japanese machine-gun, mortar and small-arms fire as he gathered authentic material for his news reports.

When the Marine Corps informed Solomon's family of his death they were the only family documented in this study for "Flamethrower" who responded. Rabbi Blechman and his wife Esther, after receiving a heartfelt letter upon the death of their son from Major General DeWitt Peck, Assistant Commandant to the Marine Corps, responded: Accept our gratitude for what you have been to us in our great sorrow. We know that God will reward our faith in His own way. May the All Compassionate establish His world in your days upon the everlasting foundation of His Law. May He bring about His Kingdom of righteousness and love for which our Solomon and other heroes and saints made the supreme sacrifice.

Rabbi Blechman not only sacrificed a son for the preservation of the nation, but he would later serve the nation himself (probably to honor the memory of his son) by taking care of veterans as a Chaplain at Veterans' Hospital No. 81, now known as James J. Peters VA Medical Center, in the Bronx, New York. The Blechmans show why this country of America is one of the greatest nations in the history of mankind.