

ROY THOMAS PETERSEN

Roy Thomas Petersen died on Wednesday, January 23, 2008.

Roy was born on November 12, 1921 in Edgar, Nebraska. He was the son of Danish immigrants Nels and Marie Petersen, the sixth of their seven children. Raised on the family farm, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1940, and was stationed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 onboard the battleship USS California. As that ship was undergoing aerial attack, Roy was ashore, in his words, "Teaching the swabbies how to shoot." As a young Marine orderly, he was present at the change of command from Admirals Kimmel to Pye after the attack. Seeking to volunteer as a gunner on torpedo bombers, he was prevented from this by the loss of his logbook on the seriously damaged battleship.

On January 18, 1943, as a twenty-one year old corporal leading a patrol on Guadalcanal, Roy was shot in the neck by enemy gunfire. The bullet passed near his jugular vein and exited near his upper spine, leaving a large exit wound but missing all vital structures. He recalled the surgeon commenting, "They almost got you where you live, boy." Perhaps, that is why he once said that he considered every day a gift.



After the war, serving as a Marine Corps recruiter in Yakima, Washington, Roy was introduced by friends to the love of his life, Joan Katherine Thomas. They were married on August 8, 1949. Together they had two sons. Theirs was a happy marriage, one in which they knew they could always depend on each other. It is his love and memory that comfort his wife now.

In 1952 to 1953, Roy was again in combat operations, this time in Korea as a platoon commander and later as company gunnery sergeant. Roy served his country and the Marine Corps honorably for twenty-three and a half years, retiring as a first sergeant. He continued to work for many years afterwards, finally retiring from formal employment in his sixties. He honored the flag throughout his life.

His family knew him as an intelligent man who loved reading and cooking. They always relied on his extraordinary memory. A very fit and physically active man, Roy was impatient with hobbies and diversions, finding fulfillment in work.

He had a strong sense of duty and an implicit personal integrity, but would never accept being singled out for public honors. He believed in confronting life's challenges directly. It was this strength which led him, sixty-five years to the day after his wounding on Guadalcanal, to accept the risks of the medical procedures which, despite the best efforts of all involved and his own strong will to recover, preceded his death. He felt that he had been fortunate to enjoy a long, healthy and productive life.

When congratulated on his service record, Roy said what he honestly felt: "There are no living heroes." It can now be said, without fear of disagreement, that he was and will always be a hero to his sons.

He was a good man who will be forever missed by his beloved wife Joan, his two sons Terry and Thomas, loving daughter-in-law Jocelyn, grandson Jopeth, and his surviving sister Erna Busboom.

Interment will be at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. The family requests that those wishing to do so make a donation in Roy's memory to the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund (semperfund.org).