

Beloved Marine honored on USMC birthday

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

Corporal Leroy Kitchens (Aug. 12, 1925 – Sept 10, 2015) was recognized on Tuesday as the November Veteran of the Month. Kitchens was the first veteran to be honored posthumously and for it to occur on the 240th birthday of the Marine Corps was most fitting.

A native of Covington, Kitchens grew up in the Garland area and traveled to Nashville to enlist in the United States Marine Corps on Oct. 29, 1943.

After his initial boot camp training, Kitchens was sent with the 1st Marine Division to Peleliu, one of the Palau Islands in the western Pacific. Landing on Sept. 15, 1944 as a part of the first wave of troops to go ashore, Kitchens and his fellow Marines faced ferocious fighting and heavy casualties. Although the island of Peleliu is just six miles long and two miles wide, the Battle of Peleliu resulted in a higher death toll than any other amphibious assault in United States military history. Of the 28,000 men who waded upon its shores, 40 percent were killed or injured. Because of the intense fighting, it was several weeks before the Marines and their Army counterparts were able to secure the island, a factor which led to the heavy casualties. Corporal Kitchens was wounded on Oct. 7, 1944 and was awarded two Purple Heart medals for his valor and service during World War II. After his wounds were healed, Kitchens traveled the country raising interest for service war bonds before being discharged from the service in 1947.

After his service in the Marine Corps was complete, Kitchens returned home to Covington and married his beloved wife Louise. He worked as a trucker for Wooten Trucking and Suburban Propane. He and his wife were members of Garland Baptist Church, where he served as a deacon. Louise passed away in 2007 and he later married a second love, Barbara Bringle in 2011.

Kitchens was nominated by his friend and pastor David Price who spoke of Kitchens loving demeanor and troubles.

“He was very proud that he was able to serve his country and to bring freedom to it. Mr. Leroy came to mind because he was not one to talk about it but if you looked at the place he had served, the man, himself and the spirit of the man, you’d see the love that he had for people and the love that he had for family,” said Price. “The only regret that I have is that Mr. Leroy could not be here. Even though I know he is in a far better place, I wish he could have seen all of you here tonight to give honors to him.”

Kitchens, the oldest of five sons of Mr. and Mrs. West L Kitchens, served as an example for his younger brothers who all later served their country as well. Brothers Robert, Ernest and Larry served in the United States Army and brother Tom went into the Navy. He was preceded in death by two of his brothers, Tom and Larry Kitchens.

Kitchens' experiences on Pelelui would haunt him for the rest of his life and prevented him from discussing his experiences and caused him to suffer from nightmares.

A few of Kitchens' friends and family members spoke of the wonderful, caring and loving man he was, all while holding back tears while remembering their loved one.

"Four years is what we had together," spoke his second wife Barbara. "My life will always be better by knowing Leroy."

Covington Mayor Justin Hanson also spoke in memory of Kitchens.

"He was uncle Leroy to me," said the mayor to laughter. "He was married to my grandmother's sister, so I've know him all my life. Very, very rarely did he speak of his service. But it is most appropriate that on this night before Veterans Day and on the Marine Corps birthday that we honor him and all of our veterans who are with us tonight."

Nephew Roy Ivey, spoke of his love for his uncle and how much the war had affected him.

"We all loved him, he was a fine man and he loved children," said Ivey. "Very rarely did he talk of his service but he was very proud of it. He had his medals in his living room, he participated in the veteran parades... he was a real American and although he got over physically [from the war], he never got over mentally of that memory."

Leroy Kitchens passed away on September 10, 2015 in his 90th year and is buried in Shiloh Cemetery.