

THE STORY OF A BOY, HIS MATH TEACHER AND HIS MATH TEACHER'S RIFLE

by Brad Simpson

The Boy

The boy is me. I was the son of parents who wanted me to go to the best school in the area and that school was Warren School District 222. It basically was a donut shaped district around the city of Monmouth. The wealthy farmers outside of town were not happy with the quality of the local high school so they supported this school district. My parents bought a house 11 miles from our hometown that was in that district. I started first grade in 1972 and Junior High math in 1978 (Figure 1).

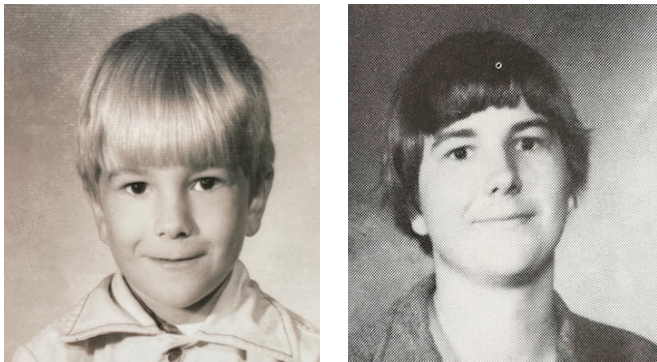


Figure 1. Yearbook pictures of Brad Simpson as a first grade and middle school student.

The Teacher

The math teacher was Robert Dunlap who coached and taught Junior high math (Figure 2). I first noticed him riding around the school in a wheelchair. He had a paddle behind his desk with holes drilled in it for extra velocity. On occasion, the whole school could here someone getting paddled. For this reason, the younger kids tended to fear him. Turns out he was a war hero; at the time we didn't fully appreciate the level of his wartime accomplishments.

Bobbie Dunlap left Monmouth College to volunteer for the Marines after Pearl Harbor (Figure 3) and ended up receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery on Iwo Jima. The text of his citation reads:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as commanding officer of Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, 5th Marine division, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the seizure of Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands on 20 and 21 February, 1945. Defying uninterrupted blasts of Japanese artillery, mortar, rifle, and machine-gun fire, Capt. Dunlap led his troops in a determined advance from low ground uphill toward the steep cliffs from which the enemy poured a devastating rain of shrapnel and bullets, steadily inching forward until the tremendous volume of enemy fire from the caves located high to his front temporarily halted his progress. Determined not to yield, he crawled alone approximately 200 yards forward of his front lines, took observation at the base of the cliff 50 yards from Japanese lines, located the enemy gun positions, and re-

turned to his own lines where he relayed the vital information to supporting artillery and naval gunfire units. Persistently disregarding his own personal safety, he then placed himself in an exposed vantage point to direct more accurately the supporting fire and, working without respite for two days and two nights under constant enemy fire, skillfully directed a smashing bombardment against the almost impregnable Japanese positions despite numerous obstacles and heavy marine casualties. A brilliant leader, Capt. Dunlap inspired his men to heroic efforts during this critical phase of the battle and by his cool decision, indomitable fighting spirit, and daring tactics in the face of fanatic opposition greatly accelerated the final decisive defeat of Japanese countermeasures in his sector and materially furthered the continued advance of his company. His great personal valor and gallant spirit of self-sacrifice throughout the bitter hostilities reflect the highest credit upon Capt. Dunlap and the U.S. Naval Service.

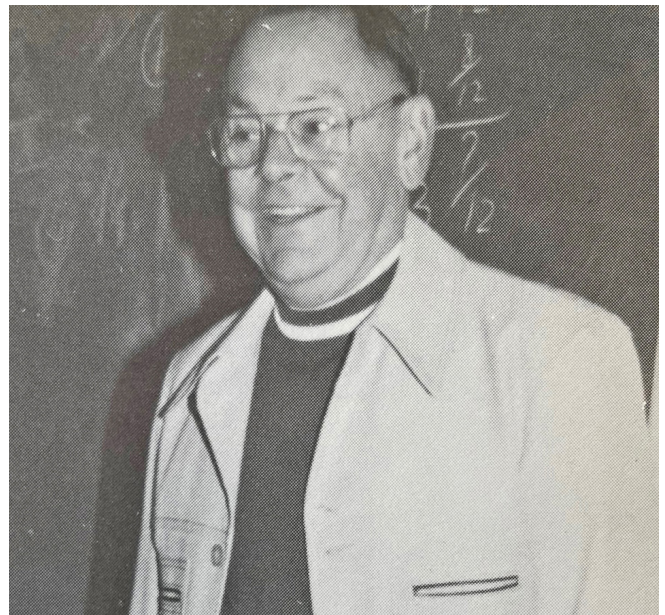
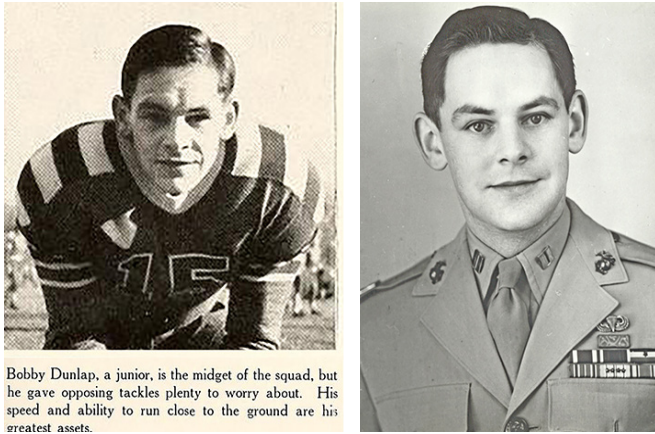


Figure 2. Year book picture of Robert Dunlap.

He was seriously injured when a Japanese soldier shot him in the hip on Iwo Jima, an injury that would affect him for the rest of his life. The Congressional Medal of Honor was presented to him by Harry Truman (Figure 4). Over the course of his life he had dinner with every U.S. President from then on. After the war he was a farmer and had a son and a daughter (Figure 5). A Japanese book was written about Iwo Jima during this time and he had a full chapter titled "The Fighting Farmer from Illinois". During this time he was courted by Hollywood and offered \$20,000 to star in a movie about his time on Iwo Jima. He was flown to Hollywood and got to know John Wayne. He started teaching and coaching in 1961. He retired in 1982 (Figure 6) and there was a speech by a General for his retirement at that year's Graduation Ceremony. I played



Bobby Dunlap, a junior, is the midget of the squad, but he gave opposing tackles plenty to worry about. His speed and ability to run close to the ground are his greatest assets.

Figure 3. Yearbook picture of Robert Dunlap as a junior football player at Monmouth College (left) and in his U.S. Marine uniform (right).

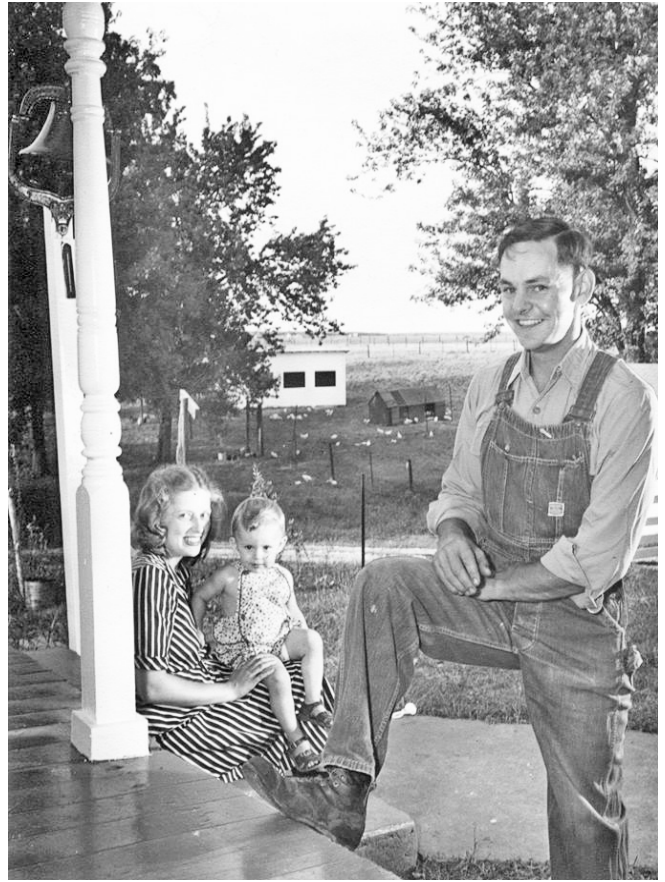


Figure 5. Robert Dunlap and family after the end of World War II.

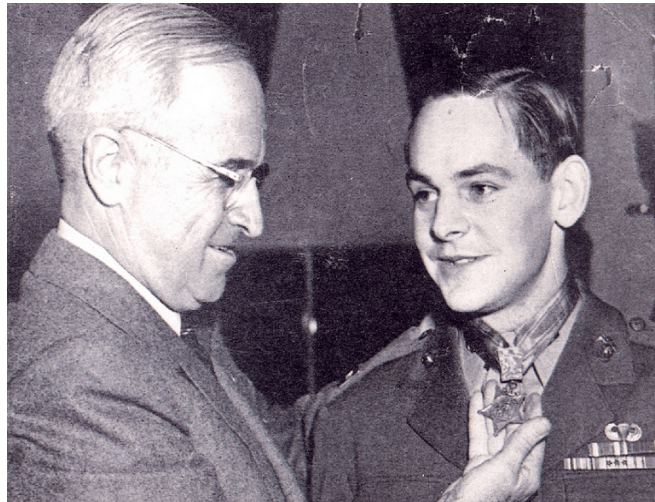


Figure 4. Robert Dunlap receiving his Congressional Medal of Honor from President Truman.

in the band at that event. Memorials were later built for him in Monmouth, Illinois (Figure 7) and Abingdon, Illinois (Figure 8). Robert Dunlap died in 2000 at 80 and is buried in Warren County Memorial Park in Monmouth, Illinois. (Figure 9).

Dedication

We, the yearbook staff of 1982, would like to dedicate this year's *Echo* to Mr. Robert Dunlap, who is retiring this year after many years of service at Warren.

Mr. Dunlap received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic deeds in World War II. Very few people are singled out to receive this award so it is a distinct honor. It is rare for high school students to even know a Medal of Honor winner, let alone to go to school to one!

"Bobby" Dunlap has been a part of the Warren School system for 21 years. During this time he has taught math in the junior and senior high school, as well as conservation classes. For 13 years he was a coach, working with junior high football, basketball and track, as well as high school basketball and track for five years.

Standing steadily by his side has been his wife, Mary Louise, who is an avid Warren fan. Their two children, Donna and Jim, are both Warren graduates.

As both teacher and coach, but especially as just a fine person, Mr. Dunlap will be greatly missed at Warren. We wish him well on his retirement.

The Staff

Figure 6. Dedication in the high school yearbook from the staff honoring Robert Dunlap upon his retirement.

Figure 7. War Memorial in front of the Warren County Courthouse in Monmouth, Illinois honoring Robert Dunlap.



Figure 8. Monument in Abingdon, Illinois honoring Robert Dunlap.

The Rifle

After Guadalcanal, Dunlap said they received 12 Johnson rifles intended for 12 heroes of Guadalcanal. Serial number A0009 (Triple O 9 as he called it; Figure 10) was intended for one of his men who had already been killed. Dunlap shot the gun and liked the way it felt and its accuracy, so he kept it for himself. He carved his first name in small letters on the stock. This was the gun he was using when he earned the Medal of Honor. After the war his men smuggled it back to the States in pieces to reassemble and present to him. He displayed it in his house until he died. The gun was featured prominently in his statue in front of the Monmouth, Illinois courthouse (Figure 7). He wanted it properly represented so he lent the gun to the sculptor; we used our Federal Firearms License (FFL) and delivered the gun to and from the sculptor's FFL in Colorado. The gun was later featured in Bruce Canfield's Johnson Rifle book in 2002.

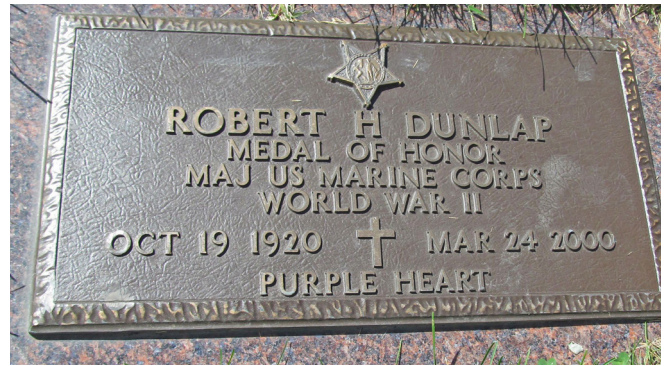


Figure 9. Grave marker for Robert Dunlap in Warren County Memorial Park in Monmouth, Illinois.



Figure 10. Johnson rifle carried by Robert Dunlap on Iwo Jima. Note the 0009 serial number (lower left) and his initials scratched on the stock (lower right).

Conclusion

I was consulting with James D. Julia Auctions about 10 years ago when I saw that the rifle was to be offered in the next auction. I couldn't believe it. I knew the gun, I knew the history and I knew its owner. It was a part of local history and needed to come back home. I tried to organize some local people to purchase it, but I ended up having to buy it myself. It is now on display at our shop (Figure 11). It is an honor to preserve it and get the opportunity to educate others about this rifle and the man who used it.

War Hero's Rifle Bought By Local Shop

By Gary Tomlin / The Register-Mail, Galesburg, Illinois

GALESBURG — The rifle that late Marine Major Robert Dunlap carried into battle on Iwo Jima and used to earn the nation's highest award for valor in combat has returned. The Johnson M1941 was evaluated but not adopted by the Marines in WWII, but the one with serial number A0009 was used by Dunlap. His comrades in arms knew how much he valued the rifle and saw that it was returned to him when the war ended. He kept the gun on his wall until his death in 2000 at age 79 when it was put up for auction. Robert and Brad Simpson of Collectors Firearms were the high bidders.

"It was an accident that we were aware that it was for sale, and we wanted to bring it home," Robert said. "It is a very important part of local history and we would like to keep it on display. We specialize in firearms history. I'm not a shooter or a hunter, I'm interested in the history and mechanics of guns." Brad added, "We did not buy this gun to resell it."

Longtime friend David Clark said Dunlap credited the rifle with saving his life. "Bobby said the Johnson was the most accurate rifle ever made. It hit everything he aimed at," Clark said. "The Japanese snipers thought no self-respecting officer would carry a rifle, and American officers on Iwo Jima didn't wear rank insignia. Bobby believed the snipers passed him by because he didn't look like an officer."

Dunlap's whole story was written in 1988 by then Abingdon High School senior Jeffery Taylor who recorded several personal interviews with him, his family and friends. Otherwise, little has been written about Dunlap's service. He only gets a paragraph or two in some of the books and war history web sites about Iwo Jima, and



those words are repeated from the paragraphs on his Medal of Honor citation. Clark confirms that Taylor's account is supported by the recordings of Dunlap and is accurate.

The horrendous 36-day battle to conquer Iwo Jima began on February 19, 1945. Captain Dunlap led Company C of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines in the 11th wave of the invasion. The previous waves had been stalled on the beach and were under heavy fire.

Dunlap recalled thinking that if he was going to get his men killed it wouldn't be sitting on the beach. He took them forward into the jungle and the stalled companies followed. By the end of the day, Company C had led the whole battalion into the island's interior.

In the first few days of the battle, Captain Dunlap was in front of his battalion, and right in front of entrenched Japanese machine gun and artillery batteries.



Figure 11. Article about the purchase of Robert Dunlap's Johnson rifle (left) and display of the rifle along with information about Robert Dunlap in the Simpson Limited gun shop (right).

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/robert-h-dunlap>

² Canfield, B. *Johnson Rifles and Machine Guns; The Story of Melvin Maynard Johnson, Jr. and His Guns*. 2002, Andrew Mowbrey Publishing.

