

Medford WW II Coast Guard veteran Edward DiGiovanni honored for saving ship

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Posted Jul. 9, 2014 @ 9:10 am



United States Coast Guard veteran, Edward DiGiovanni, left, his daughter Lisa DiGiovanni, Daniel Hurley, from the State House, and United States Coast Guard Capt. John C. O'Connor III, Ed.D., take part in a WWII citation ceremony held inside Edward's Medford home July 7. Wicked Local Staff Photo / David Sokol



Edward DiGiovanni happily accepts his medal for bravery during World War II, after his Coast Guard ship was hit by a Japanese kamikaze pilot. Wicked Local Staff Photo / David Sokol



U.S. Coast Guardsman Edward DiGiovanni accepts a citation for bravery in 1945. Courtesy Photo/Lisa DiGiovanni

Children and grandchildren zigzagged in and out of the kitchen, passing out plates of cake and grabbing sandwiches while the man with the cane and medallion on his chest sat in the middle of all the joyous commotion.

A much different sort of chaos greeted Medford veteran Edward DiGiovanni on Easter Sunday in April 1945. DiGiovanni, then 18, was aboard the USS LST-884, a tank landing ship operated by his U.S. Coast Guard unit, heading toward Japan's Okinawa Island.

Just weeks earlier, DiGiovanni and the ship's crew had participated in the U.S. invasion of Iwo Jima during the closing months of World War II. DiGiovanni stood at the bottom of the hill as a group of U.S. Marines raised the country's flag atop Mount Surabachi, as depicted in the now-famous photograph.

On April 1, as DiGiovanni's ship powered toward Okinawa, a Japanese kamikaze plane came crashing into the ship. The entire crew of about 400 was ordered to jump off. DiGiovanni held onto a life raft until being picked up by a rescue boat.

Hours later, those who survived (which was most of the crew) were asked to volunteer to reboard the ship, which held ammunition that was exploding from the crash. DiGiovanni and about a dozen others climbed up nets on the side of the ship, saving it from destruction.

"I was just not afraid," said DiGiovanni, now 87. "That's the type of personality I got."

After returning to Boston, DiGiovanni received a citation and commendation medal for his service on the LST-884.

About four years ago, one of his seven kids, Lisa DiGiovanni, found a press release from when her dad received the award. The paper, though, was crumpled and deteriorating.

Lisa contacted U.S. Navy officials in Washington D.C., who arranged to issue Edward DiGiovanni a new citation at his home on Governors Avenue on July 7 — nine days before his 88th birthday.

"My father talked about this for his whole life," said Maria Feola, the oldest. "I mean, it makes me want to cry now that I know all [about it]."

Until 2010, Edward DiGiovanni's kids didn't know the danger their dad faced during the war. But he told the story to a neighbor, who had been in the military.

The neighbor told him, "Wow, you should be commended," Maria said.

That urged Lisa to get her dad a new copy of the crumbling citation, which was delivered by U.S. Coast Guard Captain and Boston Sector Commander John O'Connor.

"To come and present a medal to someone who served our country so long ago ... That was an honor for me to be able to hear those stories from him," O'Connor said.

Daniel Hurley also attended the event on behalf of Medford state Rep. Paul Donato.

After the war, DiGiovanni attended Boston College and eventually started a wholesale pastry business, which one of his sons, Raymond, now runs.

DiGiovanni's wife, Antonetta, died in 2006 — 57 years after the couple married. They raised their family in Medford, where he has lived for more than 50 years.

"He said to me one day, 'I was supposed to die in the war,'" Maria said.

Instead, he celebrated an early birthday gift with family and friends, who shared a red, white and blue frosted cake and posed for photographs with their hero.

DiGiovanni laughed and cracked jokes as all in attendance admired him. Before one final photo with five of his kids who were there — Lisa, Maria, Patricia, Raymond and Eddy — several of them giggled as they told him to put his dentures back in.

"What did I have?" DiGiovanni said earlier, remembering when he left home for the Coast Guard as a 17-year-old.

"Zero," he added, making a circle with his fingers. "And look what I have now — I raised seven kids."

[Additional photos and above story at the [Coast Guard Compass: Official BLOG of the U.S. Coast Guard](#)]