

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Marine sworn in by Iwo Jima vet Scales

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By ELIZA WINSTON - Bulletin Staff Writer

A Marine recruit experienced living history Tuesday when he took his oath of enlistment from a fellow Marine who commanded a battalion at Iwo Jima.

Staff Sgt. Thomas Perry, a marketing and public affairs specialist for the Marine Corps, said it was rare to have a World War II veteran — in this case, Col. J. Shelton Scales — give an oath of enlistment.

It also was a unique opportunity for Dustin Johnston, who will begin basic training in June 2011, to experience “living history” through Scales, Perry said.



J. Shelton Scales (left) swears in Dustin Johnston, a rising senior at Tunstall High School, into the Marine Corps as James Rogers watches. Both Rogers and Scales are Marine Corps veterans.

Johnston, 17, is a rising senior at Tunstall High School. His decision to be a Marine was an easy one because he grew up around Marines, he said. His grandfather was a Marine and many of his friends already have joined the Marines. Johnston also said the “pride of being a Marine” made him decide to choose that branch of the service.

“I don’t know anyone who knows someone in the Marine Corps who doesn’t have pride in their hearts and stand up straighter when they hear the word ‘Marine,’” said Lt. Col. David King, who leads JROTC at Tunstall High School.

And, he added, “I’ve never met anyone who wanted to be a Marine more than Dustin.” King decided it would be a great opportunity for Johnston to be sworn in by Scales, 93, in the chapel at King’s Grant Retirement Community, where Scales lives.

“Dustin, you may be the only Marine in the United States or the world who would have this privilege,” King told Johnston before the ceremony. He added that he wanted Johnston “to take that history” of Scales’ military achievements with him.

Scales served in the Marine Corps from Nov. 1, 1940, to November 1945, and was in the Battle of Iwo Jima. He currently serves in the Marine Corps Reserve. Scales told Johnston that he recently learned that some of his distant relatives fought in the Revolutionary War, “so I have some family in the military.”

“But if I’d known what Iwo was gonna turn into, I might have looked for a hole to jump into,” he joked. Scales has said that 1,500 men were under his command on Feb. 19, 1945, at Iwo Jima, and more than 30,000 Marines landed on the beach that day. He was a major at the time, commanding the 3rd Battalion of the 23rd Marine Regiment in the 4th Marine Division. Of the 24 battalion commanders on the island, he said five were killed and 14 were wounded.

Scales was one of the five who were not wounded. "I was about 2 miles north of Mount Suribachi when the first flag was put up," Scales said. "I couldn't be sure if it was a Japanese or American flag until I got my binoculars out."

He saw the Stars and Stripes. Capt. John Tucker, who was present at Tuesday's ceremony, said the flag raised by soldiers at Iwo Jima in a now-famous photograph was "just a flag, until you think about the hands that put it there."

Although Iwo Jima was declared secure on March 16, 1945, fighting continued, said Scales, who was on the island for 38 days. "We averaged 190 (Americans) killed every day for 38 days. There were 6,821 killed, 19,000 wounded and 1,500 who suffered combat fatigue," he said.

Of the 22,000 Japanese soldiers, about 800 survived, Scales said, and few surrendered. Many committed suicide rather than be captured, he added.

Now, Scales is one of three remaining battalion commanders from Iwo Jima. Being sworn in by him is "a story he (Johnston) will be telling for the next 20 years," said Tucker. Johnston will be enlisting with delayed entry, which means he has one more year of school but his plans to begin basic training are set, said Staff Sgt. Michael Weaver.

Johnston said he is excited about earning his eagle, globe and anchor, which make up the official emblem of the Marine Corps.

He will receive it after completing basic training, said Martinsville recruiter Staff Sgt. Gary Williams. Williams added that "intangible things" make the Marines special. "Pride, leadership, self-discipline and self-direction are instilled in Marines," Williams said.