

Sousley legacy continues

Contributed by Danetta Barker
Wednesday, 11 November 2009

By Danetta Barker

Editor

The story of Fleming County Marine Franklin Sousley has attracted attention both at home and nationally for six decades. Another link in the life of the young Marine who was one of six flag raisers on Iwo Jima during World War II has surfaced.

When Sousley graduated from Fleming County High School he went to Dayton to work at Frigidaire. Several of the Sousley letters located in the Fleming County Public Library were written during his days at the plant.

Sousley enlisted in the Marine Corps and went to war where he ended up on the small volcanic island of Iwo Jima. American forces lost many lives during the three day battle. To claim victory an American flag was planted on the top of the mountain by five Marines and one Navy corpsman. The act was photographed by associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal.

Disappointed because he thought he missed the shot, Rosenthal had the men sit around the flag for another picture. He sent both across the ocean to where a guy in a darkroom thought the image of the men pushing up the flag was good enough to send around the world.

The photograph became a rallying cry for a war weary nation. The six men were instant heroes, whether they wanted to be or not. Sousley wrote home to tell his mother to look for his picture in the paper.

The 19 year old Marine was killed by a sniper a month later.

Since that time any connection to Sousley has been near and dear to the hearts of his family and friends. Dwayne Price, who took over the protection of the legacy from his grandmother, Sousley's mother Goldie Price, has a collection that nearly fills his home. But there is always room for one more piece of history.

Tom Gant brought that piece of history to Price recently. Gant, also an employee of Frigidaire, is a member of retired plant workers. During the purging of records, Sousley's employment record was found.

"This guy was going to shred the document, but he recognized the Sousley name," Gant said.

The record was given to Price. It describes Sousley and lists his employment record. The date is Aug. 11, 1943.

Sousley's height was listed as 70 1/2 inches, his weight was 157 pounds.

"I didn't know he worked at a Shell station," Price said as looked at the document. Clearly typed is the employer Mattie's Shell Station; position, "grease monkey."

As Price read the record he exclaimed, "Look here, they held his job. It's marked leave of absence. Then it's marked deceased."

Gant also remembered something else when the plant was closed, he remembered the photo of the flag raising hanging in a hallway.

Through his work with the retired plant workers, Gant managed to get the photograph donated to the group, which then donated the photograph to Wright State University.

"I tried to think of somewhere that we could donate the photograph that would not go out of business. I thought of Wright State," Gant said.

A ceremony was held and Gant took pictures with World War II veterans who worked at the plant. All the photos and documents were turned into a scrapbook and given to Price. Gant traveled from Dayton to make the presentation himself. He wanted to meet family members of Sousley.

"There's another Dayton connection," Gant said as he was ready to leave Price's office. "The guy who saw the photograph of the flag raising first, Joseph Fleck, he was from Dayton," Gant said.