



## SERGEANT EVARIST LEMAY UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS KOREAN WAR

**E**varist André LeMay was born in Port Washington, Long Island, New York in 1934. He and his younger sister were part of a working class family. LeMay's father was a tool and die maker, and his mother was a homemaker. He was greatly influenced by his grandmother, who was a patriotic Scotswoman. She would often tell her grandson about the respect she had for King George V of the United Kingdom. Whenever he gave a speech, everyone would listen to what he had to say. Sergeant LeMay's grandmother retained this spirit of patriotism when she emigrated across the Atlantic Ocean, from Scotland to the United States, and instilled in her grandchildren similar ideals.

Growing up during the World War II era taught many young Americans their duties of citizenship towards their country. Young men enlisted for military service while young women filled the factory positions they left behind in the manufacturing industry. This influx of activism instilled in Sergeant LeMay a love for his country that would come to define his life. "Patriotism was patriotism." That is, people shared the same respect for living in a united nation regardless of their political affiliation.

At the age of 15, Sergeant LeMay decided that continuing his formal education wasn't the right path for him to take. Reading travel books that portrayed exotic foreign lands inspired him, and he left school with the intention of exploring the world. Sergeant LeMay ended up in New England, where he undertook small menial jobs and sapped maple trees for two years.

As a result of World War II, the Soviet Union occupied Korea north of the 38th parallel, while the United States occupied the south following Japan's surrender. By 1948, two independent governments had been set up and both claimed to be the legitimate government of Korea. Neither side of the conflict accepted the border as permanent, giving rise to the



Korean War. In 1950, Sergeant LeMay volunteered to join the United States Marine Corps, at age 17. Although the youngest age for enlistment at the time was officially 16 with parental consent, there were some teenage men as young as 14 who were able to evade age restrictions to enlist. When his family found out about his decision, they weren't surprised. Despite many of Sergeant LeMay's friends sharing similar patriotic ideals, Sergeant LeMay himself was the only one who took action by enlisting, fulfilling his sense of duty, honor, and service to his country.

He was sent to Parris Island, South Carolina for boot camp. His experience there changed his attitude from that of a laid-back teenager lacking purpose to that of a disciplined young man possessing esprit de corps. "When your superior told you to do something, you did it twice as fast." Sergeant LeMay recalls constantly minding his own business and paying attention to everything he was told. This strict environment was crucial to the development of Sergeant LeMay's character. Upon completion of his training, Sergeant LeMay was transferred to Camp Pendleton, California before beginning his 18-month tour in Korea.

Sergeant LeMay describes Korea as "the land of the morning calm", characterized by extremely cold winters and extremely hot summers. For him, it was an eye-opener to meet fellow Marines from all over the country who had been raised in different environments. For those Marines that hailed from southern states, the nighttime freezing temperatures were

almost unbearable and likewise, for those Marines who called the northern states home, the heat of the day felt utterly scorching. As a New Yorker, Sergeant LeMay was used to experiencing four distinct seasons and over the course of time, they all learned how to survive and work together. Sergeant LeMay once went three months without showering, but it didn't matter because none of his fellow Marines had showered either. Despite the stench that came about as a consequence, struggling together in the name of a common cause contributed to the sense of teamwork present among the Marines. These Marines came to be "the men you live with and die with."

Every morning, Sergeant LeMay would wake up and tell himself, "Here I am, I have to do what I have to do." He always thought back to the patriotic values and sense of duty that was instilled in him by his grandmother and reinforced through boot camp, for it was the belief and love he felt for his country that carried him through each day of war.

Every day in Korea was different, depending on the mission at hand. The Marines went out in fire teams of four to twelve men, depending on the type of assault group needed. In the field, there was a constant feeling of uncertainty about what they would encounter at any given moment. Not only were there North Korean soldiers to fear, but they would run into their Chinese allies as well. The enemy fired waves of mortars in the middle of the night, when they were least expected. Night attacks caused the most damage to the Marines. The worst thing to happen to a soldier was not personal injury. The worst moments occurred when members of your fire team were killed or wounded. Aside from the shock of losing a brother, one would also feel a sense of guilt and wonder, "Why wasn't it me?"

Sergeant LeMay, like his Marine buddies, enjoyed receiving letters and packages from his family and friends back home. This kept spirits high and helped him maintain his sanity, providing welcome relief from the trauma of war. Marines also frequently traded the contents of the C-Type and K-Type rations they received. Aside from food, rations also included cigarettes, although they were often so old they were moldy. The rations were left over from World War II, which had ended five years earlier. Sergeant LeMay looked forward to times when chocolate was included in the ration.

By early 1953, Chinese forces mounted a massive offensive across the United Nations front line that hit the Marine out-

posts hard. On the morning of March 1, the Marines set out to capture Vegas, Carson, and Reno Hills, which came to be known as the Nevada Cities Campaign. The complexity of the mission stemmed from the fact that they were surrounded by higher ground held by the enemy. Sergeant LeMay's assault group was responsible for taking Vegas Hill. The

Marines were blanketed by seemingly never-ending rounds of Chinese mortars and artillery fire.

Some men were forced to withdraw to the bunkers, but Sergeant LeMay and other Marines persevered and kept fighting until they no longer could. During the mission, his body was struck by shrapnel from the explosion of a nearby mortar. Before he could be brought back to base, Sergeant LeMay also contracted severe frostbite, which caused him permanent loss of feeling in his fingers and toes.

When Sergeant LeMay woke up in the hospital, the first thing he saw was a South Korean soldier in the opposite bed who had had his nose blown right off. Despite being severely injured himself, Sergeant LeMay felt relatively lucky that the shrapnel that hit him didn't necessitate any amputations. Within two weeks, the doctors cleared him to return to the front lines.

Upon his return to the United States, Sergeant LeMay was awarded the Purple Heart medal by his commander. He was then stationed at a naval torpedo base in Washington State, where he served on guard duty for one year. Coming home was a tremendous culture shock for him, but some changes were welcome, such as the shift from cold rations to hot food. Despite the horrible sights he experienced from the war, Ser-

geant LeMay re-enlisted in 1956 for seven more years of service as a part of a security detachment. Since the Korean War had already come to an end, the Marines' focus shifted to Cold War-related missions. Due to the growing worldwide tension surrounding the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union's mastery of the atom bomb, Marines had to be flexible and

ready to be deployed anywhere.

As a member of the 3rd Marine Division, he was briefly deployed to Japan, the Philippines, and Okinawa. Under Eisenhower's presidency, Vice President Richard Nixon visited Venezuela and was attacked by unruly mobs. Sergeant LeMay and his Marine unit were sent to protect Nixon and get him out of the country safely. Sergeant LeMay was later deployed to Lebanon as part of the Marine Corp's 2nd Division. He also spent three years in the reserves. After his service was over, he worked for United Parcel Service for 26 years.



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In 1990, Sergeant LeMay saw a psychiatrist at a Veterans Affairs hospital for the first time. He was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), a type of anxiety affliction that can occur after an individual has gone through extreme emotional trauma involving the threat of injury or death. PTS symptoms include disturbing recurring flashbacks and avoidance or numbing of memories of the event. Even to this day, the memories of the war have never left him. Even happy occasions such as 4th of July fireworks can serve as a reminder of times of war. The mere sound of an exploding pyrotechnic display can cultivate memories of bursting mortars.

Sergeant LeMay considers himself a lifelong Marine who never thought twice about serving his country. Sergeant LeMay has remained active in veterans' affairs as a member of Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Marine Corps League, Marines of Long Ago, and AMVETS. He has also worked with New York State Senator William Larkin to advocate for the construction of the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor in Orange County, New York.

He and his wife met on a blind date and have been married for 54 years. Sergeant LeMay says he wouldn't be the person he is today without her constant, loving support. Together, they have a daughter and a son, who was a yeoman in the Navy. After experiencing the esprit de corps of the Marines both firsthand and through the experiences of his son, Sergeant LeMay says that if he were to do it all over again, he would have chosen to enlist even earlier!

