

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Hershel ‘Woody’ Williams

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Veterans Remember – WW II* Oral History project

Interview # VR2-V-L-2019-093

Hershel ‘Woody’ Williams, the last surviving Iwo Jima Medal of Honor recipient at the time of the interview, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library’s *Veterans Remember – WW II* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Dec 3, 2019

Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum’s Union Theater, Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): Jeff Nevins & Kurt Williams, videographers, Garrett West, audio technician

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: 1:31 / 1.52 hrs

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on March 3, 2020.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

**Transcript  
being processed**

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## Abstract

Hershel Williams, *Veterans Remember – WW II*, VR2-V-L-2019-093

**Biographical Information/Overview of Interview:** Hershel ‘Woody’ Williams was born on October 2, 1923 in Quiet Dell, West Virginia. He was the youngest of eleven siblings growing up on dairy farm. Only five survived to adulthood. At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack he was working for the Civilian Conservation Corps. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in May 1943 after they changed the height requirement. He went to Marine Corps boot camp in San Diego, California, then shipped out to Guadalcanal, where he was assigned to the 22 Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, and received additional training, including on the use of demolition charges and the flame thrower.

Corporal Williams experienced his baptism of fire on Guam in July 1944. For the battle for Iwo Jima (19 February – 26 March, 1945), his division was in the reserve. On the second day they were committed to battle. Fighting on Iwo Jima was brutal, and progress was bloody and very slow. On February 23rd, when it was discovered that the course sandy soil would not allow tanks to get good traction, Corporal Williams was asked if he could take out enemy pillboxes with a flamethrower. He took up the challenge, and along with four riflemen to guard him, proceeded in the next four hours to take out one pillbox after another, needing to resupply with fuel tanks and demolition charges several times. Near the end of the Iwo Jima campaign Williams was wounded in the leg but refused to be evacuated. For his actions on February 23rd Corporal Williams was awarded the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony on October 5, 1945. It was on that day that he also realized that he wore the medal to honor those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and would not be coming home, to include two of the riflemen who were sent out to protect him that day. For the rest of his life Woody has taken that message to audiences across the United States. He also served for many years as the chaplain for the Medal of Honor Society.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** battle of Iwo Jima; Medal of Honor; 22nd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division; growing up in depression era West Virginia; use of flamethrower and demolitions to destroy enemy bunkers; President Harry S. Truman; Desmond Doss; Joe Rosenthal and flag raising on Mount Suribachi;

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