

## A Lifetime of Service to Others By Lori Dunn

As we go about our day-to-day lives, it is easy to forget the debt we owe to our veterans' and everything we take for granted thanks to their service. At St. John's, we are honored to have many veterans in our congregation who not only served their country with pride, but were also involved in some of the most important military battles of modern times. Throughout 2011, we wish to thank these brave men and women by sharing their personal stories. Their bravery, honor and courage serve as guideposts for us all.

### The Quiet Hero



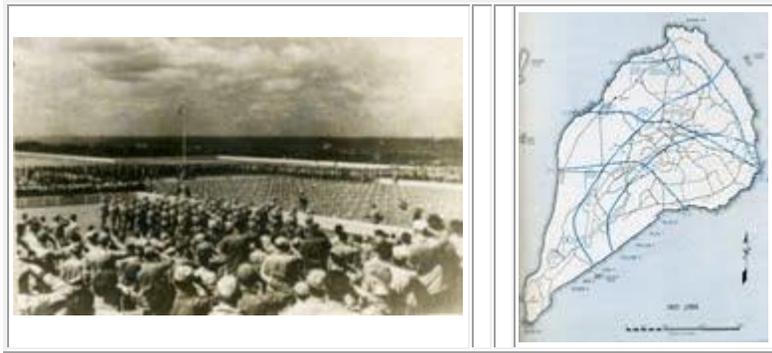
For over 35 years, Pastor Eldor Fruehling led St. John's congregation. His weekly sermons inspired, offered hope, and gave peace. His steadfast leadership guided our church and helped St. John's blossom to over 1200 members. However, many parishioners at St. John's may not be aware of how deeply-rooted Pastor Fruehling's commitment to serving others before self really is.

Raised in a rural area of southeast Nebraska, Eldor, born in 1925, was the youngest of six children. Along with four brothers and a sister, the Fruehling kids were known throughout their tight-knit community as "PKs" or "preacher's kids." Although 86 years old today, Eldor still shakes his head in disbelief when recalling how quickly his parents learned of any mischief he and his brothers stirred up while living the idyllic childhood enjoyed by those raised in a God-fearing, Midwestern community in that era.

That sanctity was shattered on December 7th, 1941. That day, our nation was set onto a new course as the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Along with it, the lives of millions of young men also changed direction. Compelled into action but against his devastated mother's wishes, Eldor enlisted in the US Marines at age 18. Twelve weeks at Camp Pendleton in San Diego, CA, was a quick indoctrination into his new life -- physical training, mental conditioning and preparedness exercises such as crawling under live machine gun fire -- all in hopes of readying the young men for the most important assignment of their lives.

After basic training, Eldor and his unit were sent to Hawaii to train for a specialized, highly secretive mission. Following several months at Camp Tarawa, Eldor and his unit quietly bo

rded a flat-bottomed “LST” ship to begin the 43 day journey to their destiny. It wasn’t until they were out to sea that they learned of their orders: secure the island of Iwo Jima.



For novices like myself who have to do a Google search to learn why Iwo Jima was a priority, don’t feel bad. The island is incredibly small -- only six miles square by my research findings. Eldor remembers it as rocky and desolate, with no living creature actually wanting to live there. Despite its barrenness, Iwo Jima had two very important things worth fighting for: strategic location and two air strips. If captured, the island would allow the United States to complete bombing missions over Japan and provide our pilots a safe place to land.

The mission had been planned for months. Naval intelligence estimated the operation to last a maximum of three to five days. Trained to load Howlitzer 105 guns, Eldor was slated to arrive on the island on the now-infamous D-Day. His mission was to keep ammo supplied to the guns.

As fate would have it, while most of Eldor’s unit landed on D-Day, he did not arrive on the island until one day later -- referred to as “D+1” -- because the duck boat that was taking him ashore was late in returning to his ship. The delay? Perhaps a blessing from God that may have saved his life. The mission lasted a total of 26 days. Approximately 25,000 lives were lost. After spending a grueling 27 days on the island, and helping to earn our victory, Eldor returned to Hawaii for recovery. He was then re-located to a base in Japan, where he began peace-keeping duties after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Blessedly, his mother only learned of his involvement on Iwo Jima after the island was secured and he was safely back to base in Hawaii.

In total, Pastor Fruehling served 2 ½ years in the US Marines, and fought beside his friends and fellow soldiers in unthinkable conditions to serve his country. Yet despite the hardships he faced, the horrors he witnessed, and the losses he endured, still today, 68 years later, Pastor Fruehling speaks of his time in the service with humility and strong personal conviction. The simplicity of his motivation, which he expresses as “to fulfill my duty to my country,” is truly a great inspiration to all of us.