UCF Veterans Legacy Program

Thomas C. Oesterreicher (1922-1945)

https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-89-F.html

Thomas Charles Oesterreicher was born on March 29, 1922, to Jacob and Vonnie Oesterreicher in Palm Valley, St. Johns County, FL. Thomas grew up in a Jewish family with two older brothers. His family lived and worked on a farm they owned.

In 1933, when Thomas was eleven, his parents divorced. Thomas and his brothers stayed with their mother, Vonnie, while their father moved to Mims, FL. Both parents continued farming, and both later remarried: his father to Ruth, and his mother to Stanley Edward DeGrove. As was typical at the time, Thomas attended school until seventh grade and then began working to help support the family.

In December 1941, the US entered World War II. The next month, Thomas enlisted in the US Marine Corps (USMC) in Orlando, FL. He completed basic training and then reported for replacement training at Marine Barracks in Quantico, VA. He learned to operate boats and worked as a mechanic and engineer. He worked hard, and by 1944, he earned a promotion to corporal. While stationed at Quantico, Thomas met and married Betty C. Lewis.

In April 1945, the Marine Corps assigned Thomas to the 5th Replacement Draft and sent him to the island of Okinawa in the Pacific Theater, the final Allied battle of the war against Japan's Empire. The USMC deployed these replacements to refill the ranks of the divisions fighting on the front lines, which had already suffered heavy losses. When Thomas arrived in Okinawa, he took part in "Operation Iceberg," a complex plan to invade and occupy Okinawa, the surrounding islands, and eventually, Japan.

Over the next several months, Thomas' 1st Marine Regiment battled the Japanese forces in intense clashes with much gunfire. On June 15, 1945, during heavy fighting, enemy fire hit and mortally wounded Corporal Thomas Oesterreicher.

Less than three months after Thomas died, Japan surrendered to the Allied forces, and World War II ended on September 2, 1945.

At first, the US Military buried Thomas on Okinawa, in the 1st Marine Division Cemetery in Ryukyu Retto. After the war, his mother chose to bring him home to St. Johns County, FL. In April 1949, his family laid Thomas Charles Oesterreicher to rest at St. Augustine National Cemetery, in Section D, Site 89.

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