

William “Bill” Baise

U.S. Army



William ‘Bill’ Baise
With 81st Wildcat Division at Peleliu

William ‘Bill’ Baise joined the United States Army during World War II. He was assigned to the 81st Wildcat Infantry Division that was headquartered at Camp Jackson, South Carolina. He was born in December 1924 at Columbia, Kentucky and entered service there as a young man. He remembers especially the battle of Peleliu in the South Pacific. Following that bloody battle, survivors were left to ponder for the rest of their lives, the miracle of getting through that combat experience alive when so many of their buddies never made it home.

Peleliu is just a dot in the Pacific Ocean and 1500 miles east of the Philippine Islands. General Douglas MacArthur ordered that Peleliu be taken to protect his flank as his forces prepared to take back the Philippines. Admiral Halsey and Admiral Nimitz thought the action was no longer needed, but MacArthur prevailed and on September 15, 1944 at 0800 hours, the American armada approached the shores of Peleliu.

More than 16,000 Marines of the 1st, 5th and 7th Divisions and the Army’s 81st Division supported the invasion. Loaded among the supplies for battle were thousands of plain white wooden crosses. Dug in, fortified, and waiting among the bunkers, caves, and tunnels were 10,900 well-trained and hardened Japanese soldiers and hundreds of Korean prisoner laborers. Marines and Infantrymen led the invasion on five separate beaches.

Major General William Rupertus, who led the attack, predicted that the fight would be quick and fierce. Unimaginable heroism combined with unspeakable horrors, suffering and atrocities added to the hellishness of the place. Against terrible losses, Rupertus committed the 81st Infantry Division. Names like Hill 100, Bloody Nose Ridge, Umurbrogol Ridge, Death

Valley, Amiangel Ridge and other hard fought battles became hellish memories for survivors as the ranks on both sides were thinned. After 3 months, on November 27, 1944 at 11 in the morning, GI’s in the 81st Division came up from the south on a mopping up mission and the worst was over.

American Marines and Army casualties numbered 9615 of whom 1656 were killed in action. Of the Japanese forces, more than 11,000 were dead. Only 302 prisoners were taken and most of these were Korean laborers. Memories of the noise of battle, the terrible 115-degree heat, the thirst and pain, fear and chaos and the stench of death have followed the veterans of Peleliu for decades.

Bill Baise was honorably discharged after World War II. He farmed all his life at Greenfield and New Berlin, Illinois. Bill is among the original founders of the WW II Illinois Veterans Memorial Committee at Springfield. His only son, Bruce, was also a member.

William “Bill” Baise,
New Berlin, Illinois