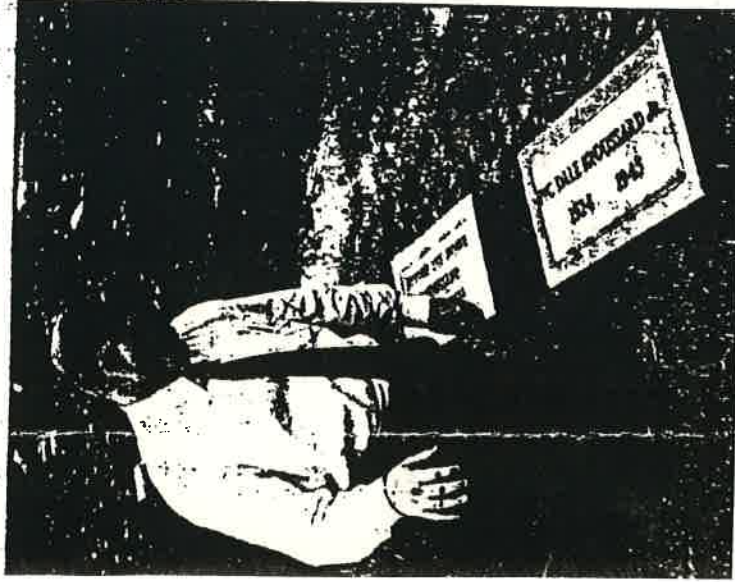


Beaumont Enterprise



Enterprise/Pete Churton
James Broussard looks at the grave of his older brother, PFC Dale Broussard Jr.

Holiday brings home brother's story

By SONJA GARZA
Staff writer

Thomas Dale Broussard's family buried him in a Beaumont cemetery more than 40 years ago, but they kept alive his memory and many lingering questions about the young World War II soldier's death.

It wasn't until this year that answers to some of those questions surfaced in an unexpected way.

Like many families whose loved ones were killed in a battle overseas, the Broussards knew when their relative died, but the circumstances of his death were a mystery.

"We've always wondered if a bomb fell on him... Did he get run over by a tank?" Thomas Dale's brother, James Broussard, said.

This Memorial Day, Broussard said, there will be "some consolation in just having the question answered."

Thomas Dale joined the Marines after his graduation from St. Anthony's High School. The government

had just lowered the age to enlist without parental permission, and his brother jumped at the chance, Broussard said.

"At the time he graduated, all the young men were wanting to volunteer for the military. They were just lining up. Of course, I was just a kid," Broussard said.

Thomas Dale was stationed in the South Pacific. He visited his Beaumont home twice on leave before going into combat, Broussard said.

"He came home the second time, and then he went back (to war) after that, and he never came back," he said softly, choking back tears.

Broussard was about 12 years old then, but he vividly remembers the day his brother left home for the last time.

It was drizzling and both his parents were crying, he said. Thomas Dale wouldn't let the family see him off at the train station because he didn't want a long goodbye, Broussard said.

Broussard also clearly recalls the

day his family learned of his brother's death. It was the Saturday night before Easter Sunday in 1945 and the family was playing dominoes, Broussard said.

"It's funny how you remember things," he said. "The death notice was on the front page of the Easter morning paper."

After the war, the government gave families the option of having the soldiers' bodies returned to the United States for burial. The Broussard family decided to bury Thomas Dale at home.

"We never heard anything more about his activity (after that)," Broussard said.

While in Las Vegas this past fall, Beaumont resident W.L. Pate Jr. happened to be seated beside World War II veteran Lenard Brown and his wife at the Tropicana Club.

Pate said Brown struck up a conversation and asked where he was

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from. Pate answered, "Beaumont, Texas."

Brown said he told Pate he had had a good friend, T.D. Broussard, from Beaumont whose family ran a funeral home and that his friend died in battle at Iwo Jima.

To the veteran's surprise, Pate told him he knew the soldier's brothers.

"(Brown) was so excited that he had actually met somebody who knew (Thomas Dale's) family," Pate said.

Pate took down Brown's name and number and gave it to James Broussard, who phoned him in January after debating for months whether he should call.

"I didn't know if I really wanted to know or not," Broussard said, recalling his initial reservations.

Brown sent Broussard about 30 typewritten pages of information about his brother's life in the Marines.

"We were together just about

all the time. He was just a very outstanding man. Anybody could brag to say they knew Thomas Dale Broussard," Brown said.

Brown also gave Broussard the number of a man who was with his brother the day he died.

Broussard called the other veteran in Omaha, who told him that Thomas Dale was among four men from his company who were sent out into the field to be a listening post on the volcanic island of Iwo Jima.

"They got about 100 feet and all hell broke loose, and my brother and another guy were shot dead on the spot," Broussard said.

Thomas Dale died presumably instantly from a gunshot blast to the head on March 13, 1945.

The island, located about 760 miles south of Tokyo, was the scene of one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. About

6,800 Americans died in the conflict. Total American casualties reached almost 25,000.

"Many people say that the island was not worth the price we paid for it, and I guess I would agree with that," Broussard said.

Pate said he believes fate sat him at the table with the World War II veteran that night.

"I felt like I was supposed to be there," Pate said. "This was something (Thomas Dale's) brother needed to know, and I was the one who got to be the messenger."

"One of the things you have to think about during Memorial Day is how many Thomas Dales there were," Pate said.

If people would think about the soldiers as human beings and realize the families they impacted with the sacrifice they made, "(Memorial Day) is more than just a Monday off," he said.

June 2, 1993

Mr. Lenard D. Brown
P.O. Box 486
Orangeville, Utah 84537

Dear Mr. Brown,

A long overdue THANK YOU for all the information you sent me about Sonny. It is certainly good to know something about his activity in the Corps. I suppose that he shared some of this information with my parents, but they never talked about it.

I talked with Mr. Surland in Omaha and felt better about the whole thing. Just knowing was the important thing.

Somehow or other the editor of our paper heard about all this and the story I have enclosed appeared in the Memorial Day issue.

Thanks again for sharing all this with my (Sonny's) family.

Sincerely,

James B.

James Broussard

P.O. Box 5593
BEAUMONT, TEXAS 77726

