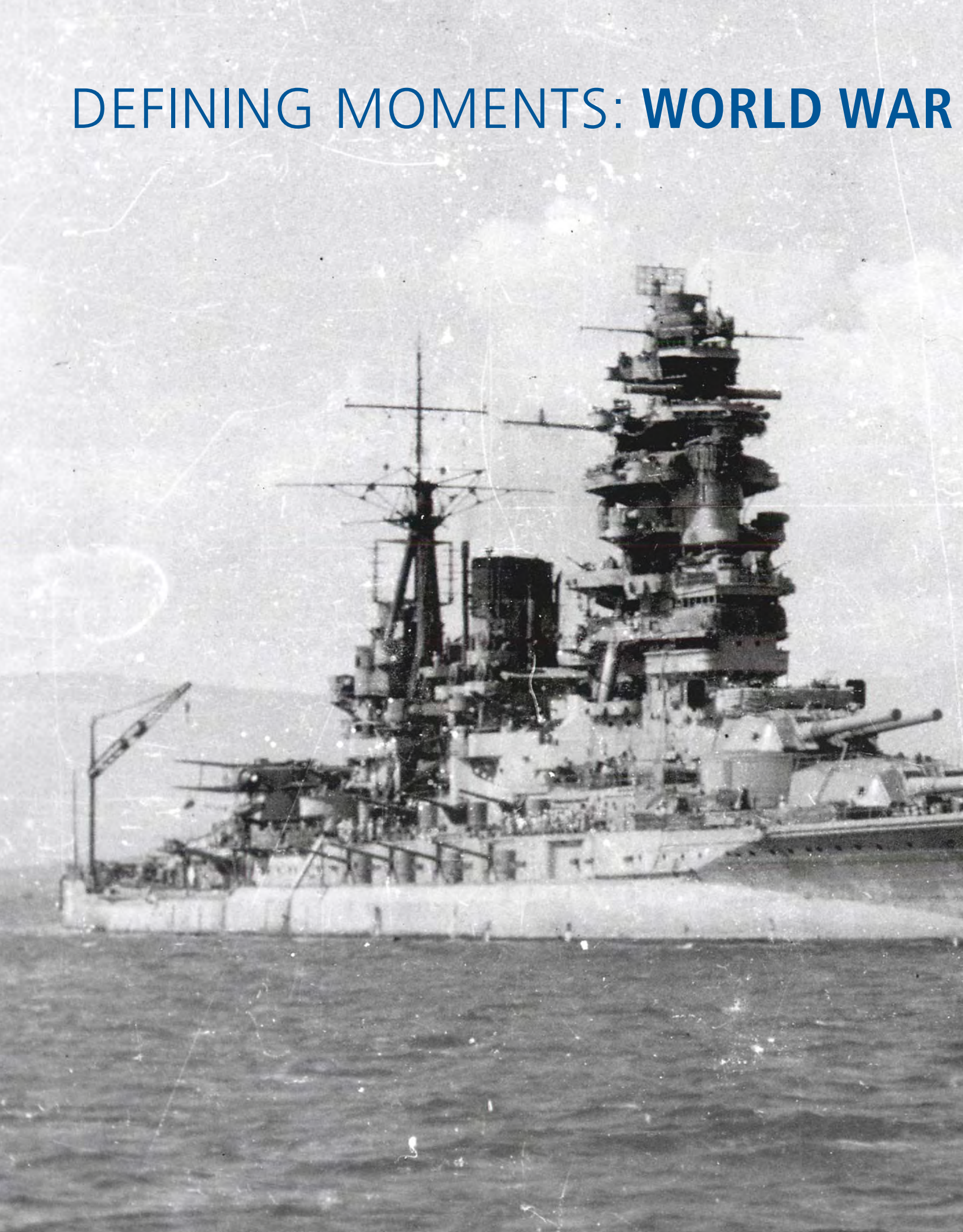


DEFINING MOMENTS: WORLD WAR



II HEROES, MARQUETTE LAWYERS

By Thomas G. Cannon

Seventy years ago, demobilized veterans flooded American law schools following the end of World War II. Marquette Law School's enrollment for 1946–1947 typified the national tide of returning military, but it was almost certainly unique in one respect: Two students in Sensenbrenner Hall wore the Navy Cross—America's second-highest military decoration—"for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force and going beyond the call of duty." These are their stories.

Ensign William J. Schaller, United States Navy (Reserves)

The morning mist evaporated just after eight o'clock on October 24, 1944. An American reconnaissance pilot, completing a quiet grid search above Leyte Gulf in the Philippine Sea, took one final glance below. His heart nearly leapt out of the cockpit. Beneath him steamed the largest battleship in the history of naval warfare—surrounded by an escort fleet of 25 surface ships.

The Japanese battleship, IJNS *Musashi*, with an overall length of 862 feet, displaced 74,000 tons. The flagship was 50 percent bigger than the largest American capital ship, making it the heaviest and most powerfully armed battleship ever built. Its 150 antiaircraft guns could fire 12,000 large-caliber shells per minute. Designed to be unsinkable, the super dreadnought contained 1,147 discrete watertight compartments and was encased in two and a half feet of armor plate. When launched, *Musashi's* enormous size created a four-foot tsunami that traveled for miles.

Maintaining radio silence, the reconnaissance pilot raced back to his carrier to report the prize. He was the first foreigner to lay eyes on the ship, which had been built in extreme secrecy at Mitsubishi's shipyard in Nagasaki. U.S. Navy planners immediately began assembling a task force from five aircraft carriers: *Enterprise*, *Essex*, *Franklin*, *Intrepid*, and *Lexington*.

At 10:40 a.m., the first of five waves of fighters, bombers, and torpedo planes began attacking *Musashi* and its convoy. Ensign William "Billy" Schaller, a 25-year-old Milwaukee native, piloted one of them. Schaller had graduated from Marquette High and the University of Notre Dame (where he was undefeated on the golf team), and he had completed one year of law school (1941–1942) at Marquette University.



Ensign William J. "Billy" Schaller, USNR (center), with crewmates aboard USS *Enterprise*. Photo courtesy of Marjorie Schaller Feerick Schlosser.

Schaller was catapulted off *Enterprise* in a Grumman TBF Avenger. His torpedo bomber carried a single Mark 13 torpedo weighing more than a ton and packed with 600 pounds of Torpex, a high explosive. Sinking *Musashi* would require considerable flight skill, courage, and luck. First, the diminutive Schaller had to evade antiaircraft fire from the cruisers and destroyers that formed a protective ring around the battleship. Next, he had to find an open flight path between the escort ships that would allow his single weapon to strike *Musashi*.

Schaller's torpedo could be released only from an elevation below 1,000 feet and at a relatively slow speed of 125 miles per hour. Both of these features made his Avenger an inviting target for Japanese naval gunners. At the same time, he had to trust that his own plane would not be hit by "friendly fire" from dozens of American fighters that were simultaneously attacking the Japanese fleet accompanying the giant battleship. ▶▶

Tom Cannon is a decorated Marine combat veteran of the Vietnam War and a former professor at Marquette Law School.



Musashi itself was a floating artillery platform. Its massive guns could fire in all directions, creating a killing field through which an attacker would be forced to fly to reach his target. The battleship's weapons included nine 18-inch guns, the largest-caliber naval artillery pieces ever built. Each was capable of firing a high-explosive, armor-piercing 3,200-pound shell a distance of

26 miles. *Musashi's* intimidating secondary battery contained six 155 mm guns mounted in four triple turrets, twenty-four 127 mm guns in six double turrets, and one hundred thirty 25 mm anti-aircraft guns. Schaller's two .50 caliber machine guns were no match for his opponent's massive arsenal.

In lethal combat, the warrior must mentally override the natural instinct for self-preservation—especially when flying directly into a maelstrom of enemy lead. To keep his focus on the task at hand, as Schaller later told *Milwaukee Sentinel* columnist Bill Janz, he invoked a basic golf precept: keep your head down. That served the Marquette law student well. Diving toward his release point, with explosions going off all around him, Schaller kept his head down and slipped *Musashi* his big fish. He scored a direct hit on the mammoth warship.

Over the course of a four-hour battle, the mighty *Musashi* sustained fatal damage from 17 bombs and 19 torpedoes. Amazingly, all of Schaller's squadron (VT-20) scored hits. The air group was credited with sinking the giant ship, and all eight members were awarded the Navy Cross. More than a thousand Japanese sailors went down with their ship in water 3,300 feet deep.

The sinking of *Musashi* marked the eclipse of the battleship by the aircraft carrier. In fact, no battleship has been built since *Musashi* sank. And the battle of Leyte Gulf may have been the last great naval battle in history—at least none has occurred in the 71-plus years since then.

Billy Schaller made it back to Marquette Law School for the 1946–1947 academic year. In addition to the Navy Cross, he carried another prized possession: a chunk of enemy shrapnel that his plane caught during one of its 50 combat missions in the Pacific.

Schaller was one of Milwaukee's great characters. In the Navy, he was said to have made a million dollars at

poker, gin rummy, and other games of chance. He became Wisconsin's amateur state golf champion in 1947. Throughout a long and colorful career as a business lawyer and racehorse owner, he made, lost, and remade several fortunes. He died in Milwaukee in 1993.

Lieutenant Clair H. Voss, United States Marine Corps

In February 1945, one of the largest armadas in naval history began converging on a tiny Pacific atoll. The convoy contained nearly 800 vessels (ominously including morgue and hospital ships) and stretched out 100 miles in length. Its destination was Iwo Jima, an obscure volcanic rock that would soon become the bloodiest battle site in the history of the United States Marine Corps.

Japan's Imperial Army embedded 21,000 soldiers on the island. They spent seven months constructing an elaborate series of tunnels, underground bunkers with electricity and reinforced concrete, camouflaged pillboxes, sniper holes, and interlocking artillery, machine-gun, and mortar positions covering every inch of the terrain. Defenders also sewed thousands of land mines to augment these formidable defenses.

On February 19–20, after just three days of U.S. naval shelling (the Marine commander, General H. M. Smith, had requested 10), three reinforced divisions totaling 75,000 Marines landed. Among them was Clair Voss, a 24-year-old former Marquette University football player from Antigo, Wisconsin. He commanded a platoon of 58 Marines, 55 of whom would be killed or wounded on Iwo Jima. The savage struggle for control of the strategic island would be the only World War II battle in which U.S. casualties (22,000) outnumbered those of the enemy.

A week after landing, Voss's unit (A Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines) was ordered to assault Hill 222, directly forward of its position. Previous attempts at taking the key vantage point had been stalled by a heavy volume of enemy mortar and machine-gun fire. Yet the obstacle had to be taken.



Lieutenant Clair H. Voss, USMC, on leave before Iwo Jima. Photo courtesy of the Voss family.

Service. Sacrifice.



Voss grabbed his work tools: a satchel of grenades and plastic explosives. Under cover of suppressive fire provided by his own men, he slowly crawled forward and around to the rear of the Japanese position. The lieutenant expertly pitched grenades to silence an enemy machine-gun nest, but his success drew hostile fire from nearby “spider holes.” Voss then crawled toward the Japanese pillbox, climbed onto its roof, and tossed demolition charges into the fortification. The resultant explosions wiped out the position.

Voss later wrote: “I was frightened, scared, and apprehensive about everything connected with being shot at on Iwo Jima; however, the training the Marines gave me overcame any fears that I had about what had to be done.”

Voss’s exceptional valor at Hill 222 would result in the award of the Navy Cross. More immediately, it also freed up his company to take its next objective. However, after he moved out with his men, a Japanese mortar round exploded next to Voss. Multiple shards of shrapnel lacerated his arms and legs, severed his nose, tore up his skull, and pierced his lung.

Voss blacked out, but a Navy corpsman wrapped a body bandage over his sucking chest wound and tagged him for emergency medical evacuation. He was placed on a stretcher, carried to a battalion aid station, and given several transfusions. From there, Voss was transported by jeep under continuous enemy fire to the beach and placed with a stack of dead bodies.

A Higgins boat conveyed Voss to a hospital ship filled with wounded and dying Marines. Navy physicians, including George E. Collentine, a former Marquette University basketball player and an alumnus of the medical school, began stabilizing Voss by draining blood from his lung cavity.

The Marine lieutenant slowly came back from the near dead. A long convalescence followed at a naval hospital on Guam, where physicians began the delicate process of removing shrapnel from Voss’s skull. Due to the difficulty of extraction, though, surgeons had to leave many bits of metal inside their patient’s arms, legs, and face. Voss was transported to naval hospitals in Honolulu, San Francisco, and Naval Station Great Lakes (north of Chicago) for six months of additional treatment and rehabilitation.

Upon discharge from the Marines, he decided to enter law school at Marquette. He graduated in the famous 1948 “class of judges.” Voss went on to a distinguished career in public service as assistant district attorney (1953–1960) and trial judge (1960–1978, 1985–1997) in Waukesha County and a term as presiding judge of the Wisconsin Court of Appeals (1978–1983). He died in 1998. ■

What would Carl Zeidler have accomplished in life if he had not decided that duty to country came first?

Zeidler was a top student at Marquette Law School, serving as editor-in-chief of the *Marquette Law Review* and graduating in 1931. He was only 32 when he won an upset victory to become Milwaukee’s mayor in 1940. His qualifications, youth, and exuberant personality suggested that in coming years he would have a big impact in Milwaukee—and quite possibly beyond.

But shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941, brought the United States into World War II, Zeidler decided that the best way he could serve his country was to enter the service. He resigned as mayor and joined the Navy Reserve. He was assigned to a merchant marine ship, the *S.S. La Salle*. The ship left the Panama Canal Zone on September 26, 1942, loaded with war materials and headed for Cape Town, South Africa. It was never heard from again. German records after the war showed that a U-boat sank the *La Salle* on November 7, 1942, about 350 miles southeast of the southern tip of Africa.

Such commitment to service. Such sacrifice.

Zeidler was one of 12 Marquette Law School graduates or students who died in service during World War II. None was as prominent as Zeidler. All gave their lives for their country. Each should be remembered.

They are memorialized in a display on the fourth floor of Eckstein Hall. In addition to Zeidler, here are their names:

- Thomas Rudolph Evert, L’39, lieutenant, United States Navy Reserve
- William Francis Fale, L’41, sergeant, United States Army
- James Robert Fitzsimmons, L’18, lieutenant colonel, United States Army
- Donald A. Kelly, L’41, staff sergeant, United States Army
- Raymond William Kujawski, L’37, staff sergeant, United States Army
- Robert Hackett Mooney, L’44, ensign, United States Navy
- Robert James Nystrom, L’45, second lieutenant, United States Army Air Forces
- Emil William Siegesmund, L’39, lieutenant, United States Navy Reserve
- William Louis Smith, L’37, corporal, United States Marine Corps
- James Richard Stroebel, L’44, second lieutenant, United States Army Air Forces
- Allen Henry Thurwachter, L’40, lieutenant, United States Navy Reserve