



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **MARY VIRGINIA MCCORMICK PITTMAN-WALLER SERVES AS AMBASSADOR OF THE NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES AND KEEP THE SPIRIT OF '45 ALIVE AT 70TH COMMEMORATION OF THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA**

Austin, Texas - On 19 February 1945, the United States of America and the Empire of Japan met in conflict on the island of Iwo Jima. During the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Japanese lost 21,570 and the United States lost 6,821 and suffered 26,038 casualties.

Forty years later, these nations met again on Iwo Jima, this time to bring together the veterans of this battle in a "Reunion of Honor" and to dedicate a monument in recognition of the sacrifices and lives both nations gave during this engagement.

In 1945, the surviving veterans of the U.S. Iwo Jima Association and the Japanese IwiTo Association agreed to meet every year to commemorate the conflict with a "Reunion of Honor." This year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of Iwo Jima fought from 19 February to 26 March 1945.

Sixth-generation Texan and long-time Utopia, Texas resident Mary Virginia McCormick Pittman-Waller represented the Navy League of the United States and Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive while attending the joint commemoration of the Battle of Iwo Jima with delegations from the United States and Japan.

Ms. Pittman-Waller, who is a national director and representative of the Navy League of the United States and Navy League Austin as well as advocate for the Keep the Spirit of '45 organization is no stranger to remembering our veterans, remembering their battles and sacrifices, tending to their needs where she can. Ms. Pittman-Waller is also an associate member of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge Association and earlier attended ceremonies in Belgium and Luxembourg in commemoration of that battle's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, also honoring her Father, Colonel James Edward McCormick Pittman, M.D., United States Army.

Ms. Pittman-Waller was present for the healing words and wreath laying ceremonies by the representatives from each nation, accompanied by music by the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force

and 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force bands and soloists. In attendance were Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, 36<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps General Joseph Dunsford and LTGEN Larry Snowden, USMC (Ret.), Chairman Emeritus, Iwo Jima Association of America. Captain Jerry Yellin, USAAC (Ret.), a veteran pilot who flew the last mission of World War II from Iwo Jima was also present representing Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive.

The ceremony was moving and difficult for many as it brought back troubling memories. The Japanese delegation remained stoic while Americans unashamedly revealed their emotions and some tears.

Ms. Pittman-Waller also climbed to the summit of Mount Suribachi where the seven forever remembered Marines raised the American flag signifying victory, a place and scene that is indelibly inked in most Americans minds.

Ms. Pittman-Waller reminded, "A nation who does not honor its ancestors and live their noble heritage is lost and will perish . . . Let freedom ring!"

When the Japanese delegation asked if future reunions could be held, the American delegation assured them that, "As long as there are Japanese bodies and American bodies buried in the black sands of Iwo Jima, we WILL return each year!"





The United States Iwo Jima Reunion of Honor Memorial.



Ms.

Mary Virginia Pittman-Waller at American Reunion of Honor Memorial following the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ceremonies and wreath laying.