

Marines and Medicine:

How Two Leathernecks Became Doctors, Fast Friends after World War II

By Valerie Leman

Second Lieutenant Craig B. Leman and Major David D. Kliever served in the Pacific theater during World War II and later became physicians and colleagues. They were exemplary Marine officers and brilliant doctors who forever adhered to the principles of loyalty, integrity, and collegiality that served them well in the Corps. Their path to the military and medical careers were very different, yet they shared common values and interests throughout their long lives.

They met after the war, as students at Harvard Medical School, recognizing each other as veterans by the Silver Star insignia each customarily wore. Kliever, an aviator assigned to Marine Fighting Squadron (VMF) 211, had been a prisoner of war in Japan from 1941 to 1945. Each POW was allowed to send out a few letters on a strict schedule, and Kliever used one of his to write to Harvard Medical School, requesting admission. Its admissions officers provisionally accepted him, adding that he should come see them when he was released. He was admitted and, eventually, he joined Leman and others in a group practice in Corvallis, Ore.

Leman considered Kliever to be his closest friend in civilian life. After Kliever's death, Leman wrote this message to the families of each:

"I met Dave Kliever 60 years ago at Harvard Medical School, and we were friends [until] he died two years ago. Every Christmas, I think of his Christmas in 1941 on Wake Island where he had just been captured by Japanese soldiers who had overrun his position defending the beach, and his Christmas of 1942, 43, and 44 which he spent in prison in Japan. Although he lost about 50 pounds and acquired tuberculosis, he survived, finished his pre-med course at OSC, and entered medical school a year after his release.

"We practiced together at the Corvallis Clinic, and he was physician to my family. About 30 years ago I gave him a box of Japanese mandarin oranges as a Christmas gift. He told me that they had special meaning for him. Late in the war, with Japan blockaded and near starvation, the POWs, who were at the very end of the food chain, were in dire straits. The International Red Cross sent him a box of mandarin oranges. The other POWs asked Dave to divide them up equally, so that each prisoner had a few segments. He saved the orange peels, shredded them, divided up the fragments, and each prisoner used them to sprinkle on his food, a few shreds at a time, till they were gone.

"Every Christmas I visualize this scene in the cold snowy mountains of Honshu in the barbed wire stockade. And I give thanks."



Marine veterans 2ndLt Craig B. Leman, left, and Maj David D. Kliever, right, met each other at Harvard Medical School after serving in WWII. They later worked together as physicians at The Corvallis Clinic in Corvallis, Ore.

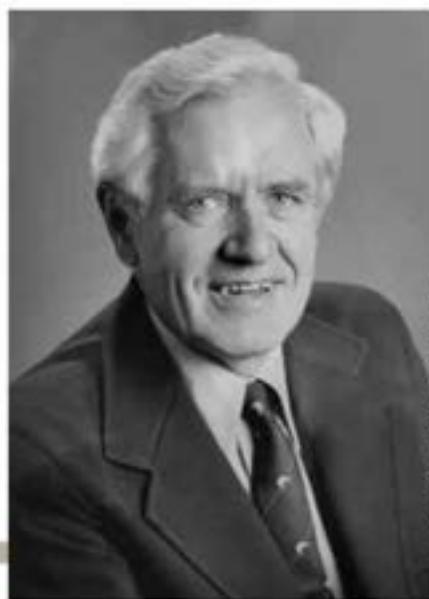
From POW to Physician

David Kliever grew up in the Mennonite faith in Montana, where his parents were missionaries on a reservation. Both he and his brother Paul wanted to become doctors, but during the Depression, there was no money to pay for further education. When Kliever graduated from college in Wheaton, Ill., he and his brother flipped a coin to see who would get a job to earn money to put the other through medical school, upon which, the other would return the favor. His brother won the toss, so Kliever decided to train as a pilot, joining the military in 1939. While Paul became a physician, Dave became a fighter pilot flying Grumman F3F and F4F Wildcat aircraft. He completed training in December 1940 and was assigned as a second lieutenant to VMF-211 at Pearl Harbor. Aerial and combat training were underway, but he wasn't aware of the imminent feeling that war was coming.

On Nov. 28, 1941, his 65-man squadron received secret orders to go on fleet maneuvers to Wake Island, where there was a limited garrison consisting of Marines and civilian construction workers. By then, the pilots had orders to shoot down any enemy planes encountered. Four days after the squadron arrived on Wake, the Japanese attacked the island. Kliever estimated that about half of his unit was lost, as well as seven or eight of their 12 aircraft. Despite the casualties, the Marines repulsed the first attack, and for the next week, the remaining pilots flew



David D. Kliever (below) enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1939 and was assigned to VMF-211, stationed at Pearl Harbor and Wake Island. He was captured on Wake and spent several years as a POW in Japan (left). In this photo, he is at the far right in the back row.



patrols. On Dec. 15, 1941, Kliever was on a solitary patrol when he dive-bombed and sank a Japanese submarine. This action earned him a Silver Star.

Soon, the Japanese began a second attack on Wake, and the Marines got word that no relief was coming. Kliever later explained in his Library of Congress oral history interview that training required them to fight to the last man, and that he as a pilot had to become an infantry Marine, for which he had received no training. On Dec. 23, he and three enlisted men took up a post at the end of the runway close to the beach, with the mission of blowing up the airfield if the Japanese planes landed. Brutal hand-to-hand combat ensued. The moment is memorialized in a display at the National Marine Corps Museum in Triangle, Va.

One of Kliever's enlisted men said to him, "Never surrender, Lieutenant. Marines don't surrender." Soon they saw a group carrying a white flag walking down the beach, but they thought it could be a hoax and shot at them. However, as the group got closer, Kliever heard his commanding officer, Major James Devereaux, shouting orders to surrender, and they turned over their weapons and were captured. They learned that the Japanese high commander offshore overruled the desire of the invading forces to execute the prisoners, probably because he thought it would be better propaganda for the Japanese to take prisoners.

Shortly after being taken prisoner, Kliever became ill with typhoid but recovered.

After a few days, all the ambulatory prisoners were transported in the hold of a passenger boat to Yokohama, threatened with

death if they talked or moved without permission. When they arrived on Jan. 12, 1942, most of the enlisted passengers were sent to prison camps in China. But Kliever and 11 fellow officers were kept in the Tokyo Bay area, where they endured brutal interrogation by Japanese pilots. They were told that if they didn't reveal all that they knew, they would be killed, since no one, including the Red Cross, even knew they were prisoners.

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Although Kliever was mistakenly identified as the communications officer, he had no information to give and gave none. He was stunned when his commanding officer, Captain Putnam, had the bravado to point him out as the pilot who had sunk the Japanese submarine. The Japanese pilots asked him a lot of questions about that. Later, the POWs were marched around on display in Tokyo streets and taken to schools to sing for schoolchildren ("Home on the Range" was a particular request).

Kliever and the others were taken to another camp on a southern island of Japan, where they met other POWs brought in from Guam, including British and Dutch military personnel, mostly officers. Kliever worked in the dispensary with one of the other POWs, a Navy doctor, who told him that he ought to pursue his goal of becoming a doctor and should apply to Harvard Medical School. They had a few books and conducted a few classes, although the authorities discouraged this. Red Cross packages came periodically, and Kliever traded his portions of cigarettes or rice for a Bible, a calculus book, and a copy of "Gray's Anatomy." After about two years, he convinced one of the more humane camp officials to allow the prisoners to raise rabbits to supplement the prisoners' meager



COURTESY OF THE CORVALLIS CLINIC

After being invited to join the group practice in Corvallis, Ore., in 1961, David D. Kliever, left, worked as a physician until retiring in 1984.

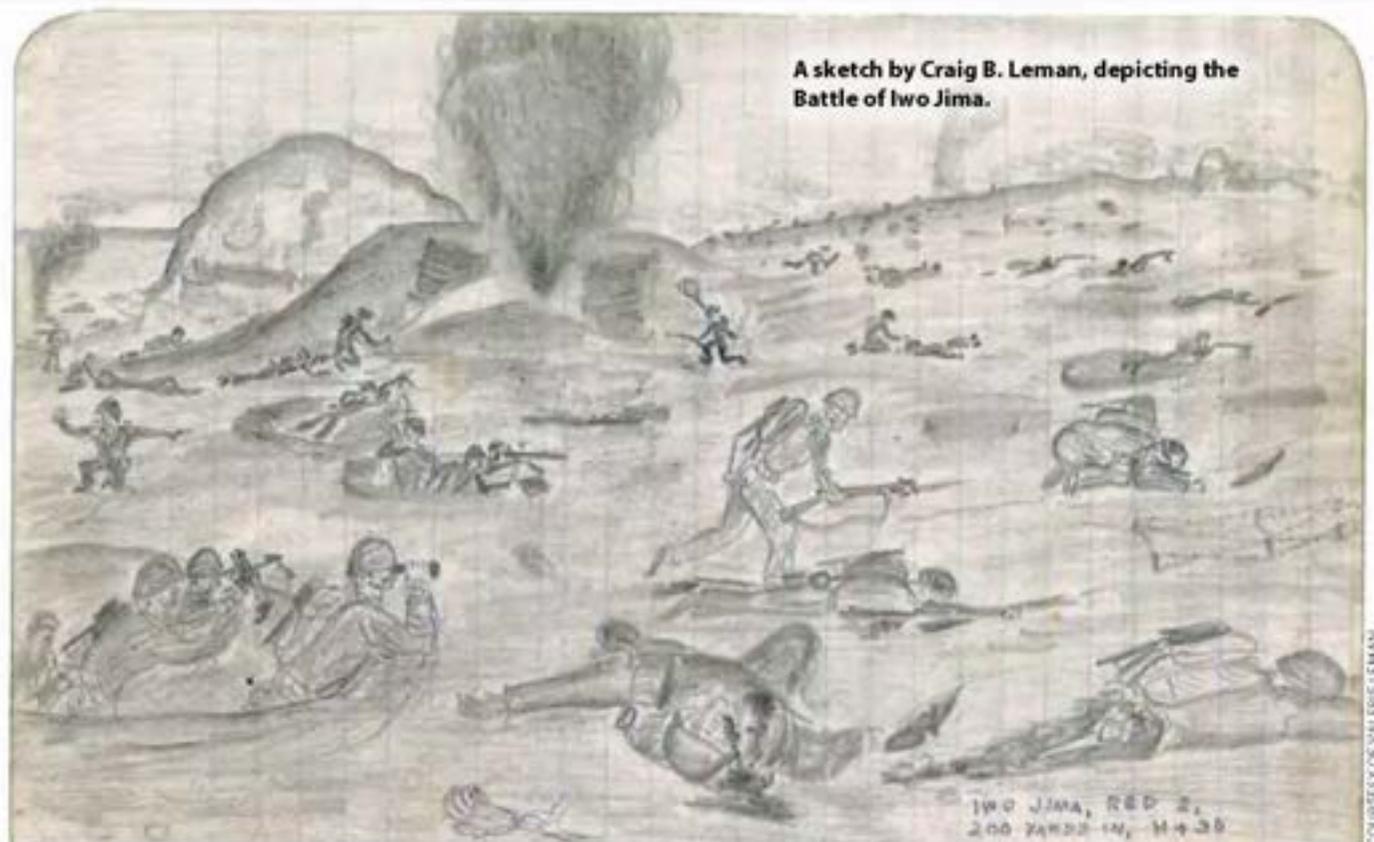
rice diet. He later credited the POWs' military discipline, including maintaining a chain of command, for staying alive and unified. On principle, he refused to sign a pledge that he would not try to escape—until he and the few other holdouts agreed that they would die of starvation with the reduced rations they received as punishment.

Toward the end of the war, the prisoners got bits of news of the Allied progress in the Philippines and elsewhere from the

enlisted POWs who were serving as stevedores at the docks. They saw U.S. bombers flying overhead and anticipated that they might be killed in bombing raids or from starvation, since food was becoming scarce. They were then taken to a different camp and told that something terrible had happened. When they learned that the emperor had surrendered after the bombs were dropped, they used toothpaste to write "POW" on the roofs of their camp buildings and received food dropped from Allied airplanes.

Soon a 7th Cavalry unit took them by train to the coast for debriefing. After being deloused and having showered, Kliever started out for the next station while still naked. Along the way he met General Douglas MacArthur, who asked, "Young man, what can we do for you?" He said that he wanted an American newspaper and cigar to enjoy on an American toilet. He got them. The Marine Corps conveyed in a telegram to his parents in Oregon that he was alive and safe, "praise be to God." They had been told for years only that he was missing in action.

During his six months of hospitalization for recovery, Kliever finished his pre-med course at then-Oregon State College and entered Harvard Medical School a year after his release. Other than having to take a year off for treatment for tuberculosis, which he acquired in the POW camp, he successfully completed his studies and served as an internal medicine doctor in Hawaii. In 1961, Leman contacted him and invited him to join the group practice in Corvallis. There, he specialized in hematology and oncology until his retirement in 1984. The doctor who succeeded him quipped, "It is not easy replacing the greatest doctor who ever lived."



A sketch by Craig B. Leman, depicting the Battle of Iwo Jima.

IWO JIMA, RED 2,
200 YARDS IN, H+35

COURTESY OF VALERIE LEMAN



Marines landing on Iwo Jima, Feb. 19, 1945. Craig B. Leman was among a group of lieutenants who were sent to exhausted rifle companies as replacement officers.

Leaning into Leadership

Leman grew up in Chicago, Ill., the son of a World War I veteran of the Army Air Corps, and a pianist. As a college student at the outset of WWII, he enlisted in the Navy's V-12 program, which ultimately led him to the Marine Corps Special Officer Candidates School (SOCS). This was a unique form of officer training for USMC rifle platoon leaders in 1944, which utilized a "need-to-know," condensed combat format of instruction.

The Quantico, Va., OCS lacked the capacity needed at the time, so the SOCS at Camp Lejeune, N.C., took in 430 candidates in July 1944 to be commissioned as second lieutenants. They began rigorous field training by NCOs and officers who were survivors of earlier Pacific campaigns, who hammered into their students' heads, "Lead! Lead! Lead! That's what you're paid for!" After 11 weeks of intensive training, some of the class washed out and returned to PFC status, but 373 of them graduated as second lieutenants on Sept. 30, 1944. The SOCS program was disbanded, and they were the only officers ever to be commissioned in that way.

"Roughly half of us went to Iwo Jima, half to Okinawa—48 of us were killed and 153 wounded. Some of us joined and trained

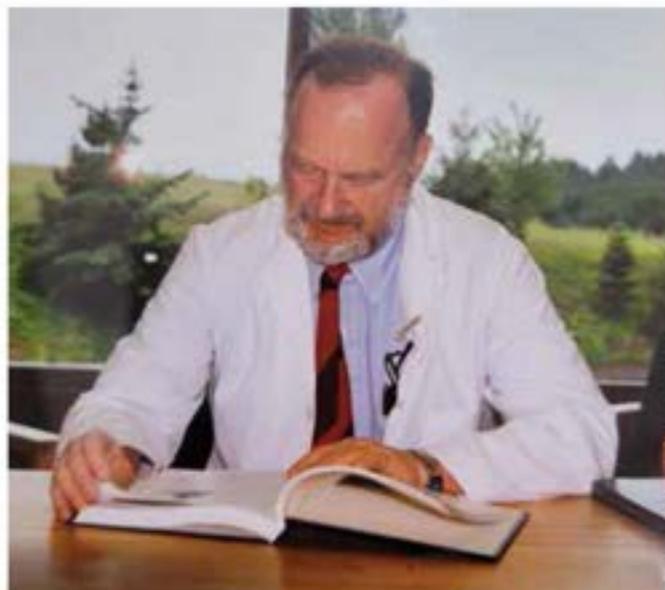
"I was in the latter group. I landed on Iwo Jima on Red Beach 2 as leader of a shore party platoon at H+2 on D-day and spent the first days on the beach, unloading landing craft and stowing gear and supplies."

—Craig B. Leman

with assault units before they landed; others joined shore party and supply units for their first few days of combat, and then were transferred to depleted assault units as replacements for officer casualties," recalled Leman.

"I was in the latter group. I landed on Iwo Jima on Red Beach 2 as leader of a shore party platoon at H+2 on D-day and spent the first days on the beach, unloading landing craft and stowing gear and supplies. On D+10, 10 of us lieutenants were sent to exhausted rifle companies as replacement officers. In the next two weeks, all 10 of us were killed or wounded."

SOCS class members earned 61 battle citations, including six Navy Crosses, 16 Silver Stars, 27 Bronze Stars, and many Purple Hearts. Leman received the Silver Star for his actions on March 8, 1945, as a rifle platoon leader. After a cave explosion, he brought together the uninjured remnants of his platoon and two others to press forward in the attack. The enemy had no opportunity to counterattack in what was then a very weak spot in the lines. A sniper shot Leman through his helmet into the back of his neck, but he refused to be evacuated until his units were dug in for the night and under a new leader. He was treated at the division hospital and evacuated.



COURTESY OF THE CORVALIS CLINIC

While attending medical school, Craig B. Leman visited recovering veterans and attributes his interest in medicine to his experience in the Marine Corps and on Iwo Jima.

After recuperating in Guam, Leman rejoined the 5th Marine Division at Camp Tarawa on the Big Island of Hawaii, to prepare for the invasion of Japan. After the surrender, he served in Palau and then was discharged in March 1946. Leman immediately fulfilled a pact he had made with three of his classmates at SOCS, in late 1944—that if any of them were killed, the survivor would visit the bereaved families to tell them about their son's last year. Trains and planes in Los Angeles were booked at the time, so he hitchhiked to Arizona to spend an emotional night with the family of one such classmate, and then to Louisiana to see the family of another.

Leman returned to the University of Chicago in 1946 to finish his history degree and then earned admission to Harvard Medical School. While still in school and medical training, Leman visited fellow recovering veterans in hospitals, beginning a pattern of striving hard to keep up his ties with the men with whom he served.

"I had thought about becoming a doctor before the war, but had



COURTESY OF VALERIE LEMAN

Craig B. Leman trained with the 5thMarDiv at Camp Tarawa, Hawaii, to prepare for an invasion of Japan.

never really made the decision, as I felt it was improper for me to go to medical school while World War II was going on, and I felt that if I survived, I would be too old. I was very pleasantly surprised when the War ended when it did, and I could go to pre-med at the University of Chicago, and to medical school at Harvard," Leman wrote in a 1985 letter to a young colleague.

"I think the reason I chose surgery was because of my experience on Iwo Jima, and in particular the sight of apparently dying men coming back from the front gray and in shock, and being transfused and then going back to the operating room and coming back several hours later very much alive and pink and obviously going to live. Surgery attracted me then, and I have never been sorry," he continued.

After Leman retired from his surgical practice, he had more time to engage in correspondence and visits with fellow veteran Marines, near and far. He wanted to make sure that the relatives of the fallen knew their stories, and he corresponded with many who wrote him to ask about service in the Marines.



COURTESY OF VALERIE LEMAN

This is the helmet that was worn by Craig B. Leman when he was shot in the back of the neck by a sniper while on Iwo Jima. He survived and was treated at the division hospital.



COURTESY OF VALERIE LEMAN

Author Valerie Leman holding a Japanese flag. Valerie is the daughter of Craig B. Leman and is a board member of the 5th Marine Division Association, the same division that her father served in.

Common Interests

Throughout their careers, both Leman and Kliever were strong supporters of community public health and humanitarian causes, speaking out in newspaper articles on current affairs that involved issues of war, including the humane treatment of POWs. They worked closely on founding a local hospice nonprofit organization, as well as anti-tobacco work and improving patient care. Each had sons who became doctors, and Kliever's daughter became a nurse. Kliever and his wife Jean were early proponents of the local Habitat for Humanity. She joked that she would help Dave on all his public health and other campaigns, and her reward "was to be taken to a Mennonite conference."

In a 1985 clinic newsletter, Kliever profiled his friend and fellow Marine veteran Leman, who was president of the local hospital's medical staff at the time, writing, "Intensity is an apt description of everything that Craig does, whether it is swimming, running, playing the piano or the practice of medicine. You will not see him on the roadway with other joggers, for he loves to run over the countryside over fences, across swamps and through poison oak patches."

Leman and Kliever each made a point of returning to the sites of their wartime experiences as a means of demonstrating that healing and reconciliation were possible and would be beneficial for all. Kliever never abandoned the pacifist principles he had learned growing up as a Mennonite, but he was also proud of being a Marine. He struggled with the knowledge that he had caused the death of enemy soldiers. His experience as a POW taught him important lessons about hope, determination, and living every day fully. When he was 72 years old, he attended a conference in Hiroshima held by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. He also visited the sites of two of the prison camps where he had been held, finding that one had been turned into a high school and one into a ski resort, and met a few of the people who had worked at the camps. They rejoiced together that both of the camps had been turned to peaceful purposes, "swords into plowshares."

Leman returned to Iwo Jima for Japanese-American Reunions of Honor in 1985 and 1995, recalling in a 1985 *Oregonian* newspaper article: "I lost many of my best friends at Iwo. My resentment toward the Japanese was consuming. However, the occupation of Japan six months later gave me the opportunity to meet Japanese civilians and to learn that they were human beings like us. If anyone had told me then that I would ever return to Iwo Jima for a joint memorial service with the Japanese survivors to honor the dead of both sides, I would have thought that person insane. How was I to know, in 1945, that the day would come when the Japanese and



Craig B. Leman, left, and David D. Kliever, right, often spoke about their war experiences and other related issues, including the humane treatment of POWs.

Germans would be our friends, and that our allies—the Russians—would not? As a surgeon, I have treated patients of many nationalities and have worked with surgeons from many countries ... I know our common humanity; I hope we can learn from our past."

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Consistent with his principles, his family has returned to the Obon Society the Japanese battle flag that he kept for many years.

In his 2011 memoir, Leman included his observations of post-traumatic stress disorder. "PTSD is a term that had not been invented in 1946, and I coped with my continued anger at the Japanese and my distress at the destruction of so many friends as best I could," he wrote. "The person who did most to cure me of my antipathy toward the Japanese was a fellow physician whom I met in medical school, Kliever ... Fifteen years after the war we stayed up all night talking about our experiences, his humane, forgiving attitude, after enduring far more suffering

at their hands than I had, helped me to overcome the anguish and bitterness that had afflicted me. These are just a few of the comrades whose memory I honor."

Author's bio: Valerie Leman is the daughter of Dr. Craig B. Leman, who was a longtime member of the 5th Marine Division. A retired judicial attorney in San Diego, Calif., she is on the board of the Fifth Marine Division Association and is a history buff who often writes articles about her father's military service.

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