

## **Erskine Wells- Hero, Lawyer, Family Man, Leader**

Erskine Wells graduated from high school and went to Ole Miss where he was elected to many leadership offices. During his last semester of law school, he was called up to the military. Already in ROTC, he proceeded to basic training.

It wasn't long after his graduation that he found himself in the uniform of a Marine officer, eventually rising to the rank of Captain of the 3d Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division during WWII. He fought in the earliest battles of the Second World War in the Pacific Theater, specifically at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. Guadalcanal (August 7, 1942-February 9, 1943) was the first major land offensive by Allied forces against the Empire of Japan. In the fierce fighting that took place there in November 1942, Erskine found himself and the men whom he was leading caught between two pockets-strong pockets-of enemy forces. And Erskine-I should say, Captain Erskine Wells-shouted to his men, "Cheer up, boys! We have the Japanese right where they want us! And then Captain Erskine Wells led his men on the only bayonet charge of that campaign.

By the end of the battle on February 9, 1943, the Japanese had lost two-thirds of their men for a total of 24,000 casualties and 1,000 their soldiers had been captured. In contrast, the U.S. Marines and the U.S. Army had lost less than 2,000 soldiers and had 4200 wounded. The ship losses on both sides were heavy, but by far the most significant loss for the Japanese was the decimation of their elite group of naval aviators. After Guadalcanal, Japan no longer had a realistic hope of withstanding the counteroffensive of an increasingly powerful United States.

For Erskine Wells' leadership during the bayonet charge of the Guadalcanal campaign, he was awarded the highest decoration of the Navy and the Marines, the Navy Cross. In writing of this incident, the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, said, "For extraordinary heroism: With such brilliant strategy and great personal courage, he personally led his men in hand to hand combat, driving the Japanese from their positions and completely annihilating them."

Erskine Wells continued to serve in the United States Marine Corps until 1946 when he was discharged with the rank of Major. He was also awarded other military commendations before coming back to Ole Miss to finish law school prior to joining his family's law firm.

His family's firm, Wells Marble & Hurst, PLLC, was founded in 1871 by William Calvin Wells. The firm was first called Wells, Thomas, Wells and later evolved into Wells Marble & Hurst, PLLC, where it is known as a premier provider of legal services in Mississippi and throughout the nation.

While Erskine Wells had a long and much success in the Marines and a successful career at the law firm, he is best remembered for being a godly, humble man with his aspirations for his church and his community. He was a Ruling Elder in this church for more than fifty years, a position that required a tremendous amount of energy, time, and prayer. He was a fierce defender of the Bible and one of the founding members of the Board of the First Presbyterian Day School, which began in 1964. He was also one of the founding fathers of the Reformed Theological Seminary, a seminary that is committed to the belief that the Bible is truly the word of God in all of its parts.

Erskine Wells enjoyed playing tennis and spending time with his family. He loved his precious wife, Nell, and he loved his sons. He respected their lives and their ministries, and he adored his grandchildren. He was most of all, amongst us, a meek man. I didn't say a "weak" man, I said a "meek" man, which means a humble man. And he, more than anything else, to the end of his life, loved his Lord. He died in 2003, but his legacy lives on with his namesakes and with the law firm that still bears his name.