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King High Remembers- Joe Aviles

If there is something very important in American society today it is the acknowledgment of our veterans. Listening to their stories and appreciating them one on one is a very special and honorable moment. Joe Aviles is a 92 year old Navy veteran who fought in the Korean War and WWII. He was kind enough to explain his life story during numerous major battles.

Joe Aviles was born on July 1st, 1925 in Grants, New Mexico. He is the oldest of five brothers and four sisters. When he was six months old, his family moved to Pomona California and Aviles attended Emerson Junior High School. During this time he enjoyed to play a variety of sports including boxing to his dad's dismay. At age 17 he was working in an Air Force warehouse where he wanted to drive a forklift but they would not give him the proper training due to his being almost 18 and eligible for the draft. Instead of continuing to work for that company he left that job and with his own decisions and choices enlisted in the military. The only problem with enlisting was his weight, he missed the requirement by a very small amount. In order for him to join the recruiter gave him a banana and two glasses of milk to pass the weigh in.

Once enlisting he originally wanted to join the Air force but could not join the branch because of an eyesight impairment so he went into the Navy instead. Aviles was assigned to San Diego for vaccines and boot camp, and he did not experience any challenge besides making the bunk properly. Aviles said that the bunks were to be made perfect condition so that the chief

would be able to drop a quarter on the sheets and make sure it bounced. After boot camp in 1943, Aviles would be moving to his first station in New Caledonia and was tasked with protecting the workers.

Time had passed in New Caledonia, and Aviles would be reassigned to the USS Saratoga CV-3 Aircraft Carrier as a Navy Seaman First Class where he was a helmsman and gunner. As this is occurring Aviles would be involved in many battles in the Pacific. Some of these include the Gilbert Islands, Bougainville, and Rabaul. Throughout all the battles he fought in the Pacific he would man the gun against Japanese Kamikaze fighters. Aviles was able to see the pilots uniform in great detail while trying to shoot them down. A very significant moment in Aviles Navy career was while the USS Saratoga was stationed in Iwo Jima. Aviles was trying to shoot down the Kamikaze planes as he almost ran out of ammo. During this time, five Kamikaze planes struck the USS Saratoga costing the lives of 300 men and injuring many others. The ship would go for repairs where they would find bodies of crew members at the front bottom of the ship who were trying to hide from Kamikaze planes. Aviles was stationed on the USS Saratoga for three years and was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1948.

During Aviles time on the USS Saratoga, the ship would go for repair a few times allowing Aviles and the other sailors time off the ship. They would be given a voucher for cigarettes or beer, but Aviles did not partake in either of the activities, instead Aviles would use the voucher to get them, sell them to others for fifty cents and get himself some coke and ice cream. A few likings of Aviles when he has time would be his enjoyment in playing volleyball and baseball. He would also learn some new vocabulary such as calling German ships “Kaiser Coffins” because of the welds on their ships that were weak. When the repairs to the ship were completed, the ship would return to the Pacific at the front of thousands of other ships planning

to go to Tokyo to invade the mainland. Another time the ship would be repaired would lead Joe to the state of Texas. At one restaurant Aviles went for dinner the staff refused to serve him even while dressed in his full uniform. He would then show his friends tacos for the first time at the place that had no issue serving him. During these times away from the ship, Aviles would meet his wife who lived in same hometown as him and liked his name. She did not want to date him, because the Navy men had reputation from having a girlfriend at every port. Luckily for Aviles, he was able to convince her that he was not that type of guy.

Aviles would then go to Corpus Christi and be stationed at the Naval Station there from 1946-1947. Next, he would be stationed in Japan training troops in 1950 in the National Guard to get his years. In 1951, Aviles was deployed to the invasion of Korea in 1951-1953 as a Staff Sergeant tank commander where he would shoot the gun. During this time it would be noisy in the tank however, Aviles would not try to be a “Macho Man,” but a wise man keeping ear plugs in. He recalled his time in Korea as cold to the point where he would have to wrap washcloths around his legs and even pee on his feet to stay warm. Even with the terrible weather they would cut the Korean forces all the way up to Pyongyang. He was honorably discharged from the Army in 1953. Aviles military career in the Navy, National Guard, and Army earned him many awards including the Korean Service Medal and Bronze Star attachment, Combat Infantryman Badge 1st award, the United Nations Service Medal, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, Navy Unit Commendation, and one he is most proud of is the Korean Presidential Citation Medal. By the end of his service, Aviles earned 6 bronze stars.

After his military Service, Aviles was happy to return home to his family. The military legacy lived on in one of his sons who was a Marine serving in Vietnam. Aviles would work several different jobs in the construction field to support his family. Sadly, Aviles wife passed

away about forty years ago, but he would meet and marry a lovely math teacher who cares and loves Aviles. To keep in good shape mentally and physically after retiring, he would participate in reunions with the three hundred remaining members of the USS Saratoga as well as other WWII veterans. He also participates in the VFW or Veterans of Foreign Wars post #233 in Beaumont, California as well as putting bricks with the names of himself and his brothers that were in the service at the Patton Museum. Aviles also loves being able to participate in King High Remembers where he is able to tell his story to 11th graders.

We are incredibly thankful for Joe Aviles for coming to tell us his story but for his service to this country. His knowledge and experiences in this life should be saved and respected by many generations. Aviles also said he would absolutely serve again if he has the chance to, but does not wish for anyone to experience. Although Aviles goes through hard thoughts especially at night, he fights through it and says to “move forward.” Even though Joe Aviles may not see himself as a “hero,” we believe Joe Aviles is a perfect representation of a hero. He selflessly fought for our country and dedicated his life to his family. Everyone should always remember to thank our veterans, we would not be where we are today without their service.