

## CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS

By Charles W. Tatum

This is the story of what happened to Captain James Fields Mayenschein, U.S.M.C. Executive Officer, B Company, First Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines, Fifth Division on Iwo Jima 28 February 1945.

He was born James Harold Mayenschein on March 9, 1919 in Pedro, Ohio. He changed his middle name to Fields when he joined the Marine Corp because Fields was his mother's maiden name. Captain Mayenschein lost his life on Iwo Jima on 28 February 1945 and was buried there for a brief time before burial in Mount Olive Cemetery in Parkersburg, WV.

Captain Mayenschein married his high school sweetheart, Inez Snidow on June 14, 1941 in Ironton, Ohio (who was born November 12, 1920 in Putney, WV and died on December 11, 2005, she is buried in Birchlawn Cemetery, Pearisburg, VA with her parents.)

They had two children, a son, James Homer Mayenschein, born September 3, 1942 in Charleston, WV and died January 6, 1988 in Tampa, FL and is buried in Birchlawn, Pearisburg, VA. A daughter, Patricia Mayenschein born November 17, 1943 in Charleston, WV. She married John G. Duncan, he died February 18, 2003 and is buried in Birchlawn, Pearisburg, VA.

James (Jimmy) Mayenschein moved to the Malden, WV area in the early 1930's, when his father James Sr. was working at the DuPont Plant in Belle, WV. He, his brother, Edwin and sister, Irene all graduated from Malden High

School. James graduated in May 1937 and in January 1938 joined the Marine Corp.

The most popular officer of B Company, First Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines was James Fields Mayenschein, a First Lieutenant, U.S.M.C. “Lieutenant Jimmy” the troops called him. A former paratrooper in the elite force, James Mayenschein stood out. Not that he was so tall; Jimmy carried his 5 foot 8 inches like he was seven feet tall. His lack of height wasn’t a handicap in the Marine Corps. The Marines measured men by what was above the shoulders.

After a four-year hitch he had returned to civilian life, but the clouds of war were looming on the horizon so he re-enlisted and was selected for Officer training. B Company’s Executive Officer was just nine days short of his twenty-sixth birthday when he lost his life on Iwo Jima. He had received notice of his promotion to Captain while aboard the U.S.S. Hanford, the APA Transporter that carried the First Battalion to its appointment with destiny at Iwo Jima.

The infamous Hill 362A was where it happened. Jimmy was always in the thick of the action and that was to prove his undoing. At Hill 362A the Japanese defenders were punching the First Battalion of the 27<sup>th</sup> Marines in the Kisser! B Company, First Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines was on the receiving end of some K.O. punches! Hill 362A was a major Japanese defense position and the Troops of the Rising Sun were instructed to defend it to the last man. “Your position will be your grave,” the defenders were told by General Kuribayashi. if the U.S. Marines took Hill 362A the Japanese high command knew that Iwo

Jima was a lost and the end would be near.

Marine commanders knew the capture of this major Japanese defense line was the key to breaking the back of General Kuribayashi's defenders who were dug in for the defense of the northern end of Iwo Jima. The Prize: High Ground. At 362 feet this ugly monolith dominated the horizon. After Hill 362A the land was flat and the Marines would be on even terms, a level fighting field terrain-wise.

The area in front of Hill 362A was bracketed on Japanese battle maps for concentrated mortar fire. We were safe from Japanese artillery fire, we were so close to the face of the hill that the Jap artillery rounds flew over our heads and hit somewhere in the reserve area. The high trajectory flight of a mortar was just the ticket for plunking those damned 90mm mortars down our throats.

The Marines' blueprint for battle was simple; frontal assault, a head-on attack. We couldn't go around it so we had to go the hard way, up and over it! In addition to the mortar attacks we faced weathering fire from snipers and machineguns implanted in the scab-marked face of Hill 362A. 28 February 1945 was the second day of the attack for Hill 362A. B Company had replaced Able Company, which had been badly bloodied the day before. Suddenly, it all went wrong!

The Japanese let us advance into the area they had bracketed for mortar fire. We walked right into their trap. B company's First and Third platoons were on a point for the assault. The Japanese were using

every kind of firepower they could throw at us. The Second Platoon, which I was attached to, was B company reserve. We were all catching hell from the Jap mortars. B Company was under such intense enemy fire that looked as if we'd all be wiped out unless someone did something quick. Someone did do something about it. Captain James F. Mayenschein saved B Company that day.

Captain Mayenschein did something every day on Iwo Jima that would have entitled him to official recognition of some kind, ranging from the Medal of Honor to the Good Conduct Ribbon. I believe his real contribution to our victory was his self-confidence and courage, which gave the rest of us the confidence to carry on day-in and day-out, in the face of the staggering losses B Company suffered.

I hope to find a member of the Captain's family in order to tell them how much we liked our Captain, how we admired his courage and leadership. I finally located his daughter Patricia M. Duncan, who was kind enough to send me the following wording from his Silver Star Medal. (Note: the citation is made out with the rank of First Lieutenant. during war-time it wasn't unusual for the paperwork to lag behind a promotion.)

The wording of Captain James F. Mayenschein citation for the Silver Star Medal tells the story better than I can write it:

The President of the United States Takes Pride In Presenting The  
Silver Star Medal Posthumously to

First Lieutenant James F. Mayenschein  
United States Marine Corps

For service as set forth in the following citation:

“For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Executive Officer of Company B, First Battalion, Twenty-Seventh Marines, Fifth Marine Division, in action against the enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1945. When his two forward platoons were suddenly stopped by an unprecedented barrage of hostile artillery, mortar and machine gunfire, which caused so many casualties that a gap appeared in the lines, First Lieutenant Mayenschein gallantly moved forward to the stricken platoons with expert tactical ability, proceeded to effect a reorganization and outlined to his subordinates the course of an orderly withdrawal. Directing the withdrawal and the evacuation of the wounded, he assisted wherever possible with first aid and the removal of the wounded to safety in spite of withering fire, persisting in his hazardous mission until fatally wounded by enemy shrapnel. His inspiring leadership and courageous initiative reflect the highest credit upon First Lieutenant Mayenschein and the United States Naval Service. He gave his Life for his country.”

For the President,  
John L. Sullivan  
Secretary of The Navy

And that's what happened to B Company's favorite officer on that ghastly day at Hill 362A. The loss of Captain Mayenschein dulled the moral of B Company. His death was hard to take. We felt if the Japanese could kill Captain Jimmy, how would we mere mortals ever make it off Iwo Jima alive? The death of Captain Jimmy served to stiffen B Company's resolve to return the battle in spades, and B Company accomplished that and more!

Captain James Fields Mayenschein

Born: March 9, 1919

At: Pedro, Ohio

Height: 66 inches Eyes: Blue Hair: Brown Complexion: Ruddy

Rank: First Lieutenant, October 1, 1943

Service (Sea and Foreign): Guantanamo Bay from December 18, 1940 to April 18, 1941; Asiatic-Pacific area from November 2, 1943 to February 14, 1944 and from August 1944 to February 28, 1945.

Battles, Engagements, Skirmishes, Expeditions: Participated in Action against enemy Japanese forces at Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands from February 19, 1945 to February 28, 1945.

Awards: Silver Star Medal; Purple Heart Medal; Presidential Unit Citation ribbon bar and one star; American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; and Victory Medal World War II.

Remarks: On active duty as an enlisted man from January 19, 1938 to November 13, 1942 and as an officer from November 14, 1942 to February 28, 1945. Enlisted and officer file jacket number 263329 and 016213, respectively.

Furnished to: Mrs. James F. Mayenschein  
Putney, West Virginia

By: G.K. Acker, Major, U.S.M.C.

U.S.M.C. Casualty Report Date: 25Mar45 Case No: 024702

Name: Mayenschein, James Fields Rank: First Lieutenant

Class: USMC Identification No: 016213

Organization: Co.B/ 1 Bn/ 27 Mar/5 Mar Div FMF

Type of Casualty: KIA (Killed in Action)

Area: Pacific

Date of Casualty: 28Feb45

Date Appt: 21Jun44 Place of Appt: Oceanside, Calif.

Marital Status: M Race: W Date of Birth: 9Mar19

Place of Birth: Pedro, Ohio Legal Residence: Malden, West Virginia

Next of Kin: Mrs. Inez Mayenschein, wife, Putney, West Virginia

Mr. & Mrs.. James Mayenschein, parents, Rand, West Virginia

Beneficiary Names: Mrs. Inez Mayenschein, wife, same address as above.

Place of Casually: Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands

Remarks: Buried Grave #991, Row #10, Plot #4, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division Cemetery,  
Iwo Jima, V.I. 7Mar45

Date and Source of Report: RAD#182131 NCR#30410 fr CG FMFPAC

To MARCORP 5MarDiv#29 Rec'd CASDIV 20Mar45

Name: Mayenschein, James Fields Rank: 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Class USMC ID#Q016213

\*Buried bulletin #13 from Headquarters, 4<sup>th</sup> MarDiv (re-interred) dated 7Mar45, received 17Mar45)

Certificate of Death received from zone 5Jul1945: Application Dated 10-6-47

Widow requested remains returned for burial in Grafton, WV  
Application dated 10-5-1947

During this time, his parents had moved to Parkersburg, WV and decision was Made between his parents and his widow to have his remains buried in Mt Olive Cemetery in Parkersburg, WV. Now his father and mother are buried beside him.

**TO THE MARINES OF IWO JIMA**  
**THANK YOU FOR OUR FREEDOM**  
**2006**

