

Looking for Sergeant Jay D. Laycock

U. S. M. C.

In early 1941, it was clear a World War loomed on the horizon. Hitler and his pack of Hun's had blitzkrieg most of Europe. The Japanese warlords were plotting their own brand of underhanded aggression. Admiral Yamamoto and his henchmen had a target, Pearl Harbor. A date had been set, December 7th 1941. "A day that would live in infamy" President Roosevelt was to say in his speech declaring war on the axis powers.

The pivotal year of 1941 was decision time for a young man from Hamilton, Ohio. Jay D. Laycock should he stay at his job as an apprentice at the Mosher Safe Company, or hit the high road to adventure. Adventure won out. Jay D. Laycock civilian, became Pvt. Jay D. Laycock, United States Marine Corps. The Marine Corps didn't let Jay down. He saw his share of adventure "On the land, sea and sometimes in the air."

After boot camp at Paris Island, Jay was selected for Seagoing School. Less than one percent of boots are selected for training as seagoing Marines. A high honor for any Marine. Jay's first duty was aboard a battle ship. The mighty U. S. S. Arkansas. The battle to supply England with Lease Lend goods was at its lowest ebb. The German submarines were wrecking havoc on allied shipping and lots of fine ships were sent to a cruel and watery grave. The Arkansas patrol in the North Atlantic helped turn the tide in the good guy's favor. The Arkie's duty included protecting convoys and ferrying troops

to England. Jay and the Marines aboard the battleship had the duty of manning the 20 and 40mm anti aircraft guns. Plus handling the 35 and 5.38 naval deck guns. While serving on the U. S. S. Arkansas, Jay and the men aboard her, took part in the campaign to invade North Africa. Jay was awarded his first campaign ribbon. The European Theater of War, with one battle star.

When the Arkansas went to port for refitting and repairs, Jay decided 20 months seagoing was all he wanted. His next assignment was landlocked at a place called Guadalcanal, no, not the island in the South Pacific, but a 5000-acre area at Quantico Officers Candidate Training School. The swampy quagmire was used to train future Marine officers in jungle warfare. Jay was one of the Instructors. After, seeing the war up close and personal, aboard the Arkansas, the swamps of Quantico version of Guadalcanal were too tame for Jay. He was tired of Guard duty and passing out bullets to officer candidates. He wanted a change of duty, Jay wanted back in the war.

News of a new Marine Division being formed got Jay's attention. It would be the Marines, Fifth Division. He went to the man (Commanding Officer) and asked for a transfer to the new Division. Jay joined thousands of other Marines trekking to the West Coast, to join the new division being formed at Camp Pendleton on the historic Santa Margarita Ranch, near Oceanside, California. His orders read, Report To: B-Company. 1st Battalion, 27th Regiment Fifth Marine Division. Lieutenant Jessie Johnson, Commanding Platoon Sergeant Sam Head, second in command. Sergeant Laycock was to lead a section in the 3rd rifle platoon.

Training was continuous and tough at Camp Pendleton and later at Camp Tarawa on then big Island of Hawaii. While we were undergoing training to become fighting Marines, Sergeant Laycock never dreamed he was destined to lead the 3rd Platoon on a God forsaken rock named Iwo Jima, and win the coveted Bronze Star for his heroic actions against its Japanese defenders. Jay landed with B Company in the first assault wave at 0903 hours, 19 February 1945. B Company and Jay's 3rd platoon was in the heart of the battle from the first Japanese shell that fell on Iwo Jima's Black Sand and stained it red with the blood of the first Marine to fall in battle.

The battle took its toll on the Marines as they fought across the island. In the battle to take Hill 362A* Lt. Jessie Johnson was wounded out of action. Command fell to Sergeant Laycock. Platoon Sergeant Sam Head was taken out of action on the second day of battle by Japanese fire. Sergeant Jay was now the ranking non-commissioned officer in B Company. The leadership of the 3rd platoon fell on Jay's shoulders. It couldn't have happened at a worst time. The 1st Battalion 27th was being relieved by a Battalion of the 28th Marines.

Casualties at the battle for Hill 362A* had decimated B Company's ranks. How to evacuate his platoon safely from hill 362A* was his first test of leadership. The normal route to safety wasn't safe. It was infested with Japanese defenders, snipers, landmines and a full scale of Japanese mortar attack was raining shells down the escape path.

Sergeant Laycock on his own initiative moved through the barrage of enemy fire to reconnoiter the terrain, to find a safe exit from danger for his platoon. Finding a route, Jay directed his Marines out, one by one. Offering words of encouragement to bolster his men's moral. As results of Laycock bold leadership, his platoon retrograded to a protected position to regroup.

Sergeant Laycock's personal supervision of his men's escape route from hill 362A* minimized the platoon casualties. Once in a safe area, he proceeded to reorganize his platoon into a full fighting unit. Ready to fight again. Sergeant Laycock's personal actions under enemy fire, were the product of the leadership training the Marine Corps had given Jay. The courage to carry out his mission was Sergeant Laycock's alone. The Marines can't train men to be courageous, or brave. There's no Marine manual to instruct men on how to be brave and heroic. Bravery, courage and motivation come from deep within a man's heart and soul.

On the 11 March 1945, D + 20, with the end of the Island in sight, Jay ran short on luck. The explosion of a Japanese mortar shell was his undoing. One of the hot lethal metal fragments struck the Sergeant, necessitating his removal from the field of battle. His wounds were treated at the 1st Bn-27th field hospital. With the captured Japanese airfields in Americans hands the famed Naval Cee – Bee's had started their special brand of construction magic.

Transforming the shell pocked runways into a smooth ribbon of asphalt for American Aircraft to land on. As soon as the runways were finished, Marine and Naval aircraft from Guam and other captured Islands began to air lift the wounded from Iwo Jima to a rear area Naval hospital. Jay was one of the first passengers. It might have been his first flight on an airplane. The Med-flight from Iwo Jima to Guam took three hours. These mercy flights saved a lot of American lives. Within only hours after being wounded a Marine would never be under the care of the best Naval doctors and nurses in the Navy. After treatment at Guam, Jay was transferred to a Naval hospital in Hawaii to complete his recovery.

The big bomb with the funny cloud stopped the Japanese aggressive tendencies once and for all time. The war finally over. Laycock's desire to make a career out of the Marines had to be aborted; family affairs needed his personal attention. Jay accepted a discharge from the Marine Corps. "It was like leaving home," he said.

His taste for adventure filled, he took a new challenge, becoming a civilian in the post war world. His first job was as an electrical apprentice. After becoming a journeyman electrician, he worked in the industrial – construction industry until 1972, when he put his electrifying knowledge to use, teaching Construction-Electricity to young apprentice at the Butler County Vocational School in Hamilton Ohio.

In 1983 Jay took early retirement and went fishing with his grandson Matthew. His study buddy and the son he never had. When he wasn't fishing with Matt, you would

find him engaged in his hobby of wood crafting. Jay loved to make things out of wood, with Matt helping. Somewhere along the way of life, Jay married the love of his life, Ollie May Martin. This marriage was life long and happy with two daughters to brighten their days, Sandra Sue and Carol Ann. Two Grandchildren, Matthew Allen and Angelia added to their happiness and made golden years precious.

Sergeant Jay D. Laycock U. S. M. C. has been transferred to a new duty station in Heaven. He's waiting at the Pearly Gates, for the rest of his platoon, friends and family to join him. The Laycock family and the Nation has every right to be proud of the Sergeant of Marines, who, when duty called "He Did It". He shouldered the burden and responsibilities of Command as a Marine and a man in the service of his God and Country. Let's thank God, America in her time of need had the cloth to cut men of Sergeant Laycock's stature from.

Written in tribute and memory of
Sergeant Jay D. Laycock, U. S. M. C.

B-1-27th-5th

Iwo Jima

By his buddy

Marine Chuck Tatum

Semper Fi Jay

* Hill 362A was a map symbol, meaning it was a hill 362 feet high. It meant it was the first hill of that height on the map. It was the worst day of battle for B-Company on Iwo Jima. The Japanese called it Tabaru Zaka, after a famed Japanese battlefield of the 1877 Civil War.