Jack Lucas

On October 5, 1945, 17-year-old Marine Corps rifleman Jack Lucas was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Harry Truman for heroism in combat on Iwo Jima. Lucas was born on February 14, 1928 in Plymouth, North Carolina. When Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan in December of 1941, Jack Lucas, though only 14 years old, determined to join the armed forces and fight for his country. On August 8, 1942, Lucas enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve in Norfolk, Virginia by forging his mother's name on a parental consent form, reporting his age as 17, and gaining official recognition of the consent form by bribing a notary. Despite his age, Lucas, 5'8" and 180 pounds, looked old enough to enlist.

Lucas went from Norfolk to Parris Island, and from there to the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida. In 1943, Lucas was assigned to the 21st Replacement Battalion at Marine Corps Air Station New River in North Carolina, eventually completing his

training at Camp Lejeune, qualifying as a heavy machine gun crewman. In November of 1943, Lucas joined the V Amphibious Corps at Pearl Harbor and soon after, was promoted to private first class.

On January 10, 1945, Lucas left his unit without leave with the intent of getting into the battle in the Pacific by stowing away aboard the USS *Deuel*, bound for Iwo Jima with the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines of the 5th Marine Division. On February 8, a day short of being declared a deserter, Lucas turned himself in to the commanding officer of C Company, Captain Robert Dunlap who took him to the battalion's commanding officer, LtCol Daniel Pollock, who in turn reduced Lucas in rank to private for going UA, and assigned him to Dunlap's company as a rifleman. On February 14, five days before the invasion of Iwo Jima began, Pvt Jack Lucas turned 17 years old.

On February 20, as part of a four-man fire team, Lucas was moving toward an airstrip when he and the members of his team spotted an enemy gun emplacement, and took cover in a trench. Nearby were 11 Japanese soldiers upon whom the Marines opened fire. The Japanese soldiers returned fire and threw two grenades into the trench where the Marines had taken cover. Lucas saw the grenades on the ground in front of him and yelled to the other Marines to protect themselves as he dived on top of one of the grenades, trying to push it into the volcanic soil beneath him, while grabbing the other grenade, pulling it under his body. One grenade exploded, throwing Lucas into the air and onto his back, exposing in his left hand the other grenade that did not explode. Though still alive, Lucas could not speak.

The other fire-team members assumed he was dead and pressed on with their assault. Not long after this, a group of Marines from another unit passed by the trench and saw that Lucas was alive. They called for Navy corpsmen to take care of him, and they acted quickly to remove Lucas to safety. He was first treated on a cargo ship that had been converted to a hospital ship, and eventually to the Hospital ship *Samaritan*. On March 28, 1945, Lucas arrived in San Francisco. Despite undergoing 21 surgeries to remove shrapnel and repair wounds, there remained in Lucas' body around 200 pieces of metal.

By August, Lucas was a patient in the U.S. Naval Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina and while there, the charge of unauthorized absence was removed from his service record, and he was restored to the rank of private first class. Lucas was discharged from the Marine Corps Reserve on September 18 because of the disabilities caused by his wounds.

On October 5, 1945, Lucas, with Captain Dunlap and several other Marines and sailors, were awarded the Medal of Honor by President Truman in a ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House.

Lucas died of leukemia on June 5, 2008 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Left behind were his wife, four sons and a daughter, seven grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. In September of 2016, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus announced that Lucas would be honored by the naming of an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer after him: USS *Jack H. Lucas*.