

# Jack Lucas: Youngest Man to Win the Congressional Medal of Honor



*Congressional Medal of Honor winner with his nephew, BCCC student Bill Edwards, outside Snookie's in Washington.*

## **Introduction** **By Bill Edwards**

Risking his life beyond the call of duty during World War II, seventeen-year-old Jack Lucas from Plymouth, North Carolina, jumped on two grenades in a foxhole on the island of Iwo Jima,

saving the lives of his fellow Marines. His inspiring action and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest military honor given by the United States. Jack, the youngest soldier to win the Medal of Honor, is also my uncle. He was generous enough to take time out of his busy schedule to have lunch with my instructor, Dixon Boyles, and me to relate the events of the battle and other interesting details from his colorful life that only a creative writer could imagine.

The life of the seventy-two-year-old war hero has not been smooth sailing. The ups and downs of his life are reflected by his adventurous spirit and willingness to take chances and live on the edge. He has made and lost three fortunes, married and divorced three times, but is now happily married to his fourth wife, Ruby. When the Vietnam War broke out, Jack wanted to get back into the action. He joined the Airborne in 1961, but his superiors would not agree to send him to Vietnam, instead assigning him to Fort Bragg to train troops for Vietnam. He made Captain before his honorable discharge in 1965. If he couldn't go to Vietnam, he wanted out.

Jack then went into the meat business and made a fortune. His second wife conspired to have him killed, and luckily for Jack, she contacted an FBI undercover agent. "She just got greedy," mused Jack. "She saw all that money." Jack asked the judge to go easy on her, and he eventually got her ten-year sentence suspended. When asked why, he laughingly said that he had rather have her close by so he could keep an eye on her. He never was resentful or held any grudge. "Besides, we had two wonderful kids, and I wanted my kids to have a mother." Their divorce broke Jack's heart. He sold the business shortly afterwards and has since been involved in several successful businesses and public speaking across the country, proclaiming patriotism and love of country with evangelistic zeal. He has met every president since Harry Truman,

except Jimmy Carter. He recently returned from Washington, D.C., from a meeting with President and Mrs. Clinton, and on his way home, he agreed to an interview with *Life on the Pamlico*.

Jack Lucas: I was thirteen years old at the time the war broke out (WW II), December 7, 1941. I was a cadet captain at a military school in Salemburg, N.C. near Fayetteville, N.C. I remember a cold chill ran down my spine when I heard over the radio that our troops had been attacked by the Japanese. From that day on, I became obsessed with wanting to go and serve my country and fight the Japanese. I had no thoughts about the question of a boy or man. I just knew I wanted to go kill some Japanese. I already had three years of military training at the military academy. My mother would not lie about my age to sign the paper for me to join the Marine Corps. Well, I told her that I wasn't going to study anymore, and that I wasn't going to do a thing in school or abide by anybody's authority or nothing. She would have to let me go into the Marine Corps. So I told her, "I promise you when I come back from the war, I will complete my education." Of course later, when I did come back from the war, I did complete my high school education and went on to get my B.S. degree from college. But at the time I would have made any compromise just to get my way of going into the service. She wouldn't sign, but I knew she wouldn't rat on me or anything. I got a hold of consent papers from the service, and then I went to Belhaven and got a notary, gave her fifty cents, and had her notarize the signature on the consent papers that mother did not sign. I took that paper and went to Norfolk and joined the Marine Corps.

Life: How old were you at the time?

Jack Lucas: I was fourteen years old, and this was August 6,

1942. See, it took a lot of negotiations between the time the war broke out and being able to do that, cause I was fooled around by some uncles and friends saying they would help me get in. They weren't doing anything except delaying action. So I went on to Parris Island, S.C. A lot of people thought it was difficult in Parris Island, but I didn't because I was very strong at fourteen, and I was very knowledgeable in military drilling. I had had three years of military school, so my Drill Instructor (DI) would stand over there under a shade tree out of the hot sun and have me drill the troops. He knew that I knew what I was doing, so he would have me drill.

Life: How did you get the Medal of Honor?

Jack Lucas: We were in a foxhole, and those trenches and foxholes were dug by the Japanese. At the ends of the trenches were tunnels. So if we destroyed their pillbox, they could go underground and come out and not be exposed to fire, and these were trenches that the Japanese had built. So we go into this trench where we were firing at the Japanese and, oh God, up popped these Japanese. There were eleven of them in the next trench. I didn't count them up, but there was a count later. They were killed in that trench. We opened fire on them. We were not more than six feet from them. They were so close I didn't put my rifle on my shoulder. I fired off hand like this. (Jack demonstrates firing a rifle with a waving action with his arms, simulating a spraying action.). The last Jap I shot hit him right here (Pointing to a spot above the eye), and my rifle jammed and I looked down at my rifle. It didn't extract the cartridge all the way. The cartridge didn't fire, and I couldn't feed in another cartridge.

I looked down trying to un-jam it, and I saw two grenades over in front of my buddies. None of us saw them come in. If my rifle

hadn't jammed, some of us would have been finished off. Anyway wounded. So I just dived on the grenades. Wasn't any use of me trying to throw them back cause... hell, I didn't know how long they had been there. I might have gotten it full force, but I jammed one down deep in the volcanic sand with my rifle and reached over and got the other one with my hand. The one I had in my hand didn't blow up, and I still had it in my hand when the other one blew up and blew me over on my back. When I saw those grenades, before I ever started traveling toward them, I hollered "grenades" to alert my buddies.... And I guess they looked down and saw what happened. They ran out the trench, and I don't know where they went after that. I guess fighting the Japs we were still entangled with.

They just left me for dead, and I just kept moving my left hand. The grenade didn't knock me out. God, how did it keep from knocking me out? Hell, it punctured my right lung and everything. Still, it didn't knock me out. If it knocked me out, I'd drowned in my own blood, because the blood that was rushing so fast in my nose and mouth would have coagulated in there and cut off my air. I was having terrible suffocation symptoms. It was just scaring the devil out of me. I was talking to myself. God, please save me, please save me. I wasn't talking out loud or anything, because I had a mouth full of blood. I just was thinking these things. God please save me. So my body went violent like when you ring a chicken's neck and throw him out there he goes everywhere. Then my body started going into these convulsions, and nobody paid any attention to me.

Another outfit moved in and saw me moving my left hand. They called a corpsman to me, and he medicated me with morphine and put sulfur all over me and taped me...bandaged me up and pulled my arm around which had been blown behind me. He medicated it, wrapped it up. I was hit in the chest, my neck, and my

right side, arm, and right side of my body. As he was finishing medicating me, he shoots the devil out of another Jap that came up out of a hole where they threw the grenades on us. He killed him. They say Corpsmen don't carry weapons. He was carrying a carbine. That Jap...he[thecorpsman] emptied that clip into him...eighteen rounds into him. He saved my life. If he hadn't been there, that Jap would have finished me off. He saw that I was moving. After he medicated me, he sent for the stretcher-bearer. But before the stretcher-bearers could come, we were under attack. Mortar fire from the Japanese. After that the barrage lifted. The stretcher-bearers came in and got me. They started running back and they hadn't gone 100 feet and one of the ones carrying me stumbled and fell, and I split the back of my head open on a rock. Just one more thing. Then they got me back of the lines, probably 100 yards or so to kind of a gathering place for the wounded which was many of them and they medicated me some more with plasma morphine. I started fading out, but before I faded out, they covered me over with a poncho. I said, "Oh my God, I'm dead." You see in the movies, that sucker's gone, they cover him over. But I guess they were covering me over to keep the elements out: all the gun fire and smoke. By God, I had a hard time breathing. When they put the poncho over me, I passed on out so it didn't matter anyway.

When they took the poncho off me, it was night time and they were putting me on an Amtrac to take me out to sea to a LST. They couldn't afford to take us out during the day because of the shelling. As they were taking us out to a LST, damn if a wave didn't come along and wash me off the barge. A sailor caught me by the foot and pulled me back up on the barge, and back up on the cot. The salt water might have done me good, but it wasn't pleasant for me at the time (Laughing). There were a lot of things like that that happened. The next day they loaded me on a LST.

Now a LST was too tall to get us off the Amtrac, so they lifted us up on a barge next to it. They offloaded us onto the barge, and then they lifted us up like sacks of flour on our cots and down in the hold of the ship. When they put me down in the hold, it looked like thousands of Marines on stretchers. Later of course, I learned statistics that we lost 5,320 men the first two days there at Iwo. A big whack...a lot of troops. But after awhile they took me off the ship that night and put me on another, a Higgins boat that time, and told them to take me and the other badly wounded to a ship to be operated on.

We got out there and the damn ship was full and wouldn't accept us, and we had to turn around and go back to the barge, back up and back down, and repeat the cycle. The next day they loaded us on a LST again, and we went through that cycle again: lifted up, down, loaded us on the Higgins boat and took us to a ship that did accept us. We pulled up alongside this big tanker type ship and it was a cargo ship because all the hospital ships were full of wounded Marines. So what they done was to set up operating rooms taking officers' quarters on the ship.

The seas were pretty rough and this sailor had this great big rope. He was trying to throw it to us, but the rough seas made it difficult to get the rope to us. This officer up there, he grabs the rope away from him and he is going to do it. That fool, when he snatched it away from the sailor, he drops the whole coil of rope. And where does it land? It lands smack on my chest. That whole coil of rope drops forty some feet and lands on my chest. I started spewing blood. So they got me right on the ship and started operating on me right after that, but my arm was in such a mess, they wanted to cut my arm off. I begged the doctor and asked him please try to save it, even if it dangled. They did a good job cleaning me up, and they saved my arm; and after about two years, I was able to go back to using my fingers again. So that was the



## Life on the Pamlico

beginning of my seven months in the hospital and twenty-two operations. I endured five major ones. The rest were minor operations removing shrapnel.

Life: Was most of that stateside?

Jack: Well, it was on the way. Of course, they took me back. They operated on me on that ship. Then they took me to Guam hospital and operated on me. I was there about a week, and then they put me on another ship, which was a big hospital ship that gathered Marines and took us on back to stateside. They operated on me at the Naval Hospital in San Francisco. Then they put some of us on hospital trains and distributed us around the country to hospitals because there were just so many influxes of people. The ones who were long term care, they took to hospitals that were close as possible to their homes. They took me to Charleston, South Carolina. It was the closest hospital to accommodate where I lived. I was discharged from the Marines September 18, 1945.

Life: When did you get the Medal?

Jack Lucas: I was home, was told I was recommended for some medal...I don't know what it was. Nothing was further said when I was separated from the service, so I just forgot about it. So I was home over in Plymouth, North Carolina. My mother was living in Belhaven at the time, and I was over at Plymouth visiting some relatives and chasing around this young lady named Carolyn Brown that I had fallen in love with and couldn't do without. So they got up with me and told me that some people from the White House in Washington, D.C. was calling. I thought it was malarkey. Come to find out they wanted me to be up there to be decorated October 5, 1945. I had separated from the service in September.

## Life on the Pamlico

They chased me down about a week later, told me to be up there in Washington.

I went up on the train with a friend of mine, and my mother and brother came up later by car. I was decorated October 5<sup>th</sup>. That's



*Jack Lucas with President Clinton*

the day they declared Nimitz' day. A few days later, Nimitz took me to New York City with him for a parade down New York City. Mayor LaGuardia met us at the airport, and they had a ticker tape parade down Fifth Avenue. Girls would try to rush up to my side of the car and kiss me, because you know, I was a seventeen-year-old kid and they went for that. Anyway, they tried to drag me out of the car. One girl...I think she had a tongue three yards long...she liked to choke me to death. (Laughter) New York women got a long tongue.

After that they took us up to City Hall and presented a gold medal to Nimitz, and then they gave us a duplicate of it. Then Mayor Laguardia took us to the Skylight Room on top of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and they had a delicious looking model escorting me. I didn't know any better. We were having dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in a special private dining room. There was Admiral Nimitz, Mayor Laguardia, and a lot of dignitaries. They got music, so I get up and start dancing. I was dancing all around tables. I was the only one dancing. Everybody else just looking. I didn't ask permission from the Admiral or nobody. But after that, Nimitz took me all around the country with him, different places...got to meet Admiral Bull Halsey and a lot of dignitaries. I didn't know who Admiral Bull Halsey was... I was just a Marine private. Of course, I learned later what a great admiral he was. I still have a picture of my girlfriend Carolyn right across from Admiral Bull Halsey.

Life: Nimitz and Halsey, were they the same?

Jack Lucas: Nimitz, he was in charge of everything. Bull Halsey had his fleet. I don't know what you call it, but he was subordinate to Nimitz. Of course, Bull Halsey ...he had his fighting around the Philippines that was done there in support of landings and things, and another, Admiral Spruance, really whacked the Japanese. At one time they caught them [the Japanese] coming through this strait. They really outdid them. They lined their ships up like this, so the Japanese couldn't attack all the ships. Instead of being in line, they attacked the ships in the mouth. When the Japanese came out, these ships over here could really whack them. See and they were facing like this...and... They really beat the devil out of the Japanese, because the Japanese couldn't come out in force with firepower except in line.

Life: The main commander at Iwo Jima, wasn't he Buckner. Simon Bolivar Buckner?

Jack Lucas: The Marine commander at Iwo Jima was Marine (Halaman) Smith. Forrestall was Secretary of the Navy. He was overlooking the whole thing. In fact, they got the flag off the ship that Forrestall was on. Forrestall wasn't in command of anything. He was just...he was Secretary of Navy, but he was there to observe the battle of Iwo Jima. They took that bigger flag, cause the first flag couldn't be seen, so they took one of the big flags from one of the admiral's flag ship, then took it up and raised it so the men below could see the flag.

Life: Was that Mt. Surabachi?

Jack Lucas: Mt. Surabachi was taken by the 28<sup>th</sup>. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division was composed of the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> regiments. The 28<sup>th</sup> was assigned the task of taking Mt. Surabachi. The 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> cut across the small neck of the island. The island is shaped like a hog's ham. At the end of the shank was Surabachi. The 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> cut across above Surabachi and cut it off from the rest of the island. The 28<sup>th</sup> took Surabachi. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division landed to our right, and they went up the right side of the island. Later, on the second and third day, I think they had to bring some regiments in from the 3<sup>rd</sup> division for reinforcement. They were the back-up reserve. They had so many casualties they had to bring in another regiment, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division alongside of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Our division, the 5<sup>th</sup>, was on the left side of the island. I was wounded up in the first air strip, the first big airfield they had on the island. I forget the name of it. They had three strips. One was for the smaller airplanes. You see, that was the reason we took the island of Iwo

## Life on the Pamlico

Jima, because it had such big fighter groups there, and they would go up and attack our B-29s en route to Japan and the wounded planes coming back. So they estimated we saved ten thousand airmen from dropping in the sea from wounded aircraft coming back from Japan that landed at Iwo Jima after we took it. So it was quite an achievement. It wasn't like Palau that could be bypassed and go on to attack the Philippines.

Life: Almost like an aircraft carrier sitting out there, I guess.

Jack Lucas: Palau could have been bypassed to attack the Philippines. Palau could have been bypassed. We lost a lot of Marines taking that island. MacArthur wanted to take it.

Life: Did you ever see MacArthur?

Jack Lucas: No. Most of the brass of the Marines, Army, Air Force and Navy were too far removed. Admiral King sent me up on his plane to New York. Admiral Nimitz and I rode together. Since then I have met Colin Powell, Norman Swartzkoph. Talked to Colin Powell several times. Have pictures of all of these. That doesn't make me any kind of big shot; it was just that people put a medal around my neck and called me a hero. I never thought of myself as that. I just felt like I sacrificed myself for my buddies. It didn't matter where you were from; we looked after one another in the Marine Corps. We were a brotherhood, looked after brothers. Someone could have saved my life just like that corpsman did. So I appreciate the fact that I have had many opportunities to meet great people. That didn't put any nickels in my pocket or anything, but it gave me pleasure knowing great people who have accomplished so much for our country, and it gives me great pleasure as I read about my hero, George Washington. What



*Jack Lucas (center) and other medal winners with Norman Swartzkoph.*

he gave for this country, the sacrifices he made for this country. As idolized as he was, he could have become a dictator, but he just chose to serve his terms as our President. He didn't wish to be a ruler. But he was really idolized by his country for what he did, and he helped formulate one of the greatest documents next to the Bible that this country has ever known.

**Life:** He might have been the only man that could have held it together.

**Jack Lucas:** Well, he was the only man who held it together. He had the ability to choose good military leaders to train our people at Valley Forge and places and tacticians to beat the British, and he was a persistent rascal. He just held out. You know some people just have that ability. He just hung in there.

**Life:** Where did you say you were when you heard that the Japa-



## Life on the Pamlico

nese had attacked?

Jack Lucas: I was at Edwards Military Academy. I went there when I was eleven years old.

Life: Did you hear it as an announcement?

Jack Lucas: I heard it on the radio. All we had was radio. I was in the dining room when it was announced on the radio December 7, 1941, Sunday morning, that our country had been attacked by the Japanese. All these ships had been sunk and all these people killed. They estimated how many people had been lost. To think some people were trying to take our country over and hurt my mother! I'd been influenced by Billy Edwards's daddy who was a Marine. He and Billy's mother, the first place they came after they were married in South Carolina and he was getting separated from the Marine Corps was to spend a few days with my daddy and mother. I was six years old, and my brother was just a baby. The first recollection I had of his mother was I stood up in a chair and asked to kiss her. I was going to show her how Robert Taylor kissed. I got up there in that chair, grabbed her, leaned her over backward, she thought I was going to drop her, and kissed her. She said I was a strong little boy.

In the course of that, Billy's daddy gave me a Marine Corps cap. I used to wear that cap to school. We lived out in the country and had to catch a bus to school. So I'd wear that cap to school, and the bigger boys would tease me and grab my cap and sling it around, and I'd fight them. They thought they were going to intimidate me. Never did. It hurt my feelings they do my cap like that. I took pride in that Marine Corps cap, and every day, I'd wear that cap. That cap had a bill on it and every day I'd get in a fight over my cap. So my daddy come on the bus and told those boys that they better leave that boy alone, and don't mess with his

## Life on the Pamlico

cap, because he's going to wear that cap. I just fell in love with the Marine Corps, because of his [Billy's] daddy, and that branded me as a Marine. So when the war broke out, I knew I had to become a Marine. It's funny how people can influence the young. That's why I'm careful when I go to schools and places speaking, because in my course of travels, I've had many people come up to me and say that I was the one who influenced them to become Marines. I read your story and it gave me great pride to make me to want to be a Marine, your looking out for your fellow buddies like that. That made me stop and think. You know, it was something beneficial in this after all. To influence patriotism in so many young people in America, and that why I'm careful what I say to people when I go to those places and try to teach patriotism.

Life: You never know whom you are going to influence.

Jack Lucas: That's right. You never know who is asleep and who is awake or how much you might influence them. I try to teach patriotism wherever I go. Love your country, the flag, and what it means to be an American. Our freedom is not free. It comes with a price, a sacrifice. So many people have given up there tomorrows for our today, and so many young people don't realize how many people died in World War II, so many people. China lost right at twenty million and Russia lost twenty million. How many Jews were burned up in Germany? The French lost over six million. How many were lost, killed in Germany? Six to eight million? How about our own country? The British, and when you add it up, there were over sixty million people that died as a direct result of WWII. It's an astronomical figure of people that gave their lives to give the world freedom. And on top of all those figures, how many were wounded? You have got five or more wounded to every one that was killed.

What a struggle! Anybody that starts writing a paper about WWII, they really have got a project. I had a young girl call me from Florida and she began to ask me questions about WWII. I told her I'm not an authority on WWII or a historian, but I can tell you little bit about what I know about it. But before you ask me any questions, let me ask you a question. How many people do you think were killed during WWII? She said thousands. I said young lady, you don't even have a grasp of it. Think in terms of millions and then go back and do your research and find out what it took for you to enjoy your freedom today. I said, now let me ask you a question. Would you give up your life for somebody else's freedom? You don't have to answer that right now, you just think about it, and think about all the millions of young men who gave up their lives for the future, for you and your parents that enjoy all the freedom of this country that you are enjoying today. Now you go to school and ask your classmates that same question. Pose questions like that and then you can reflect on the price of freedom that you're enjoying today. It's hard for young people who are enjoying so many good things, our many luxuries, to sit down and assess the price that has been paid.

Life: Well, a lot of people don't have a frame of reference to compare it to.

Jack Lucas: That's right, that's very true. It's hard to do that if you're not knowledgeable about certain things. It's a blank in your personality. That's why it is so important for people to get a broad education, not just concentrate in your field, but broaden out. Get a broad education to really have a better perspective on things. We have so many things today that expose young people to knowledge if they really pursue it. The Internet, the library, television. We get news from around the world instantly, just like

that (He snaps his fingers). Just recently 17,000 people lost their lives in Turkey. Lot of people don't know where Turkey is.

Life: Did you have many radios out in the field to hear Tokyo Rose?

Jack Lucas: Well, while I was in battle we didn't, but we did have it in Honolulu. In fact, Tokyo Rose was the one that got me to thinking. See, all these ships came in, but not all assembling for troops. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marine division came in on troop carriers. Well, you're talking about 45, 000 marines. You don't assemble all these troops in a harbor for nothing. Tokyo Rose told us that you people will be blown off the island when you come to our shores. We know you're sending troops from Pearl Harbor. She is saying that and I am listening to it. Uh huh, these guys are going to battle, and I had tried everything to be sent out to battle. I'd gotten into fights and everything to be sent into battle, because they say to the bad guys, "We don't want you in our outfit, so we are going to send you out to combat." So anyway, I started being bad, that was my thing to be bad, so they would ship me out. But it wasn't working. So I said, "Man, I'm a slow learner. This ain't working for me, so I'm gonna have to do something else."

So when these troop ships came to Pearl Harbor, I just quietly folded up my extra pair of fatigues and things and walked out the gate and went down to Pearl Harbor and they were shuttling troops back and forth from the ship with these Higgins boats. They used to be used to land troops. So I just went aboard one of them. I didn't care what ship they took me to. I was gonna get on that ship and stay. So I went out and at the same time I wanted to see if I could find my cousin. Find my cousin in a 20,000 unit of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. Hell, that's the size of Washington, right? So, I get out there, and damn if they didn't take me right out to the

## Life on the Pamlico

first ship, the one he was on. (Ha, ha) He was on liberty, so I stayed on that ship till he come back. He came back off liberty and we talked and talked till dark came, and he said you better be getting off the ship, we're pulling out of here tomorrow. I told him I knew it, and I'm going with you. He didn't object. My cousin Alvin is from Plymouth.

Life: Did he make it thorough the war?

Jack Lucas: Yes, he lives in Plymouth and the guys I saved at Iwo are living, too. One is a teacher, one retired up in Wisconsin, and the other one in Dallas. When I got wounded, my cousin was not more that thirty feet away. My captain saw what happened.

Life: That's quite a story, Jack. I guess on the ship everything was confusing? You stowed away and nobody noticed you.

Jack Lucas: I just walked around. You got thousands of Marines on ship, and didn't know one from the other. You might know some people in your platoon, your company. You don't know everybody. I could have been from a outfit on the other end of the ship. I could be up front visiting. So I just walked around. I dragged my fatigues in the ocean, pulled them up, and hung them up to dry, standing there in my skivvy drawers. I was always neat. My fatigues were a month old, when I turned myself in on board ship. I was in neat clean fatigues. I only had one set, so they gave me some new fatigues and they must have been for someone about seven feet tall.

When I went ashore at Iwo, I rolled the legs of my fatigues up but when that idiot dumped us out in the water, the pant legs unrolled in the water down over my boots. When I got ashore, I took my knife and cut the legs off. One was cut off shorter that the other.

## Life on the Pamlico

It was comical, me running up that beach with one pant leg shorter that the other. I looked like a ragged Marine. Bullets were flying everywhere and dust from that volcanic ash was everywhere, and you couldn't walk in it. It was like walking on beanbags. You would take a step and sink in the sand up to your knees. Actually it was a blessing to me when I jumped on those grenades. When the grenades went off in the ash under me, it blew that black ash in me and compacted my wounds and kept me from bleeding to death, although they still gave me sixteen pints of blood over the next few days. I lost a lot of blood. I had enough holes in me. Just this hole (pointing to a scar on his arm) was big enough for me to bleed to death in a few hours.

Life: Jack, you're wearing a hat that say *USS IWO JIMA*. LHD7. What's that?

Jack Lucas: The Marines are dedicating this ship. They had an old ship named *USS IWO JIMA*, but they are putting it in mothballs, and they are building a newer ship. It looks like an aircraft carrier. A big modern aircraft carrier is about 1100 feet, but this is 840 feet and shaped like an aircraft carrier. When it's full, it will carry a battalion of Marines with all the necessary support: helicopters, Harrier jets, and a hovercraft. The back end opens and drops down so the hovercraft can exit and re-enter. It can lower the back end enough so the hovercraft can leave on a mission and return in the rear of the ship.

Life: How does it lower itself?

Jack Lucas: It has huge jets on the back end of it. In just seconds, it can take in enough water to lower it so the hovercraft can exit and re-enter.

## Life on the Pamlico

Life: Something like a lock?

Jack Lucas: Yes, and it has its own hospital, generals, and everything aboard. It's self-contained for a battalion of Marines, about 1200 Marines, with Harrier jets and helicopters up on the weather deck. Beautiful ship. And they took that sand from Iwo Jima and put it in the mast. They call it stepping the mast, and they put things in there. Memorabilia from Iwo Jima. A book in there on the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine division and a series of articles and stories about me in the mast of the ship along with a bottle of Iwo Jima sand.

Life: What was the name of the ship?

Jack Lucas: *USS IWO JIMA*. It will be christened February 2000, and they are going to put a big painting of me in action in the ward room.

Life: Have you seen the painting yet?

Jack Lucas: Yes, the painting was published in 1995 on the front cover of the Marine Corps magazine. It was painted by a famous Marine Corps artist. He has a book out of artwork depicting the history of the Marine Corps battles.

Life: Jack, I'd like to go on, but I have to get back to campus. We sure have enjoyed visiting with you and hearing all these interesting stories.

Jack Lucas: Because of that, I've been very fortunate and thank God for blessing me. You know the Bible says in John 15:13 that no greater love has a man than to give his life for a friend. At the



*Bill Edwards, Jack Lucas and others in front of U.S.S. Iwo Jima..*

time I didn't know anything about that scripture. I was just a sixteen-year-old boy.

Life: As a country we were lucky to have men like you. I'd like to think that there are enough left that could do it again if we had to, but I don't know.

Jack Lucas: I look around every day and I see fifteen and sixteen year old boys and even seventeen and eighteen and I don't see that much of America's spirit and pride in this great country. If they would just look around and just think about it. This magnificent country. No country in this whole world has ever been cre-



## Life on the Pamlico

ated like this country. There are things that need to be corrected by this country. God almighty we have the most magnificent society in the whole world. No other country can even come near this. People pay hundreds of thousands of dollars just to get into this country illegally or legally. How many other countries are like that?

## Conclusion

By Bill Edwards



*Jack Lucas wearing Congressional Medal of Honor before parade float honoring him.*

Good fortune allowed me to live with Jack for several months some years ago, and I grew to love and respect our family hero. His legacy in military circles is obvious, but those intimate with him look upon him as the man, the father, the husband, friend and

## **Life on the Pamlico**

community servant. His keen respect for education, responsibility, and to be all you can be is paramount with Jack. He has demonstrated that anyone can be born a poor country boy and ascend to any heights he so desires. He once said that it doesn't matter what circumstances that one begins with, it's how he finishes that counts. He often gives thanks to God for his many blessings, but Jack took advantages of opportunities that the Lord provided. He has always been a go-getter and tackled jobs with zeal and enthusiasm as if saying, "I was once dead, but now I'm alive." His near death experience clearly focused his perspective on living life to the fullest.

I was amazed at the demand for Jack to speak across the country. He has to decline invitations to speak or he would be on the road constantly. Now his first love is his lovely wife Ruby and their beautiful home in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where he welcomes family, many friends and distinguished guests. Thank you, Jack, for setting an example for us and your unselfish work and efforts to make a positive influence on many young people.