

Henry Lewis Hulbert arrived in France at age 50, initially building barracks, later becoming the supply officer for 66th Co, 1/5. However, it wasn't long before he was in action in a place called Belleau Wood.



Henry Lewis Hulbert: Marine Gunner An Ending and a Beginning

Story by Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret) · Illustrations by Jason Breidenbach

"Marine Gunner Henry L. Hulbert, now on duty with the 5th Regiment of Marines, American Expeditionary Forces, has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by General Pershing for gallantry in action. A cablegram has been received by the War Department on July 3rd from General Pershing, recommending Marine Gunner Hulbert for a commission as Captain in the Marine Corps."

—Major General Commandant George Barnett
to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels
6 July 1918

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the death of a distinguished Marine. It also marks the initial presentation of an annual Marine Corps award in his honor. Currently scheduled for presentation during early December, the Hulbert Trophy for Outstanding Leadership will be awarded to the Marine gunner, selected by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, as best exemplifying the qualities of leadership exhibited by Henry Lewis Hulbert.

Candidates for the annual trophy will be Marine gunners in the rank of chief warrant officer 2 or CWO-3 and military occupational specialty 0306, infantry weapons officer, serving on active duty as a battalion infantry weapons officer within the ground combat element of the operating forces during the period of eligibility.

The officer recommended for the Hulbert Trophy will be recognized by his seniors, contemporaries and subordinates as the officer who most sets the example of outstanding leadership, courage, military bearing and tactical-weapons employment in the Marine gunner community. Through his personal example, he will set the standard in all things that others will emulate. He will be a living reminder of the personal qualities of Henry Lewis Hulbert.

Who was Henry Lewis Hulbert? His

story began 26 March 1898, when he applied for enlistment in the Marine Corps at the Marine Corps Recruiting Station in San Francisco. Born in Kingston-Upon-Hull, Yorkshire, England, he was 31 years old, although he fudged his age by two years in order to be under the maximum age limit for enlistment. With a war with Spain in the offing, that little white lie wasn't looked at too closely. Two days later, 28 March 1898, he was sworn into the Marine Corps at Marine Barracks, Mare Island, Calif., where he immediately

delphia was bound for the Pacific, which didn't mean the cruise would be entirely routine.

Imperial Germany was becoming aggressively expansionist and casting an eye about for colonies. One area of particular interest to Germany was Samoa, a geographically important region to the United States and Great Britain. By early 1899, rebel forces, armed with the latest German Mauser Model 1898 military rifle, were frequently attacking forces loyal to the hereditary chieftains friendly to America and Britain. The consulates of both countries were under siege. By March, *Philadelphia* and other American and British warships were underway for Samoa. By their arrival, widespread fighting had broken out.

On 1 April a superior rebel force near the town of Faglii ambushed a combined column of American and British Marines and seamen. Casualties were immediate and heavy. The rebels had chosen their ambush site well; the position of the Anglo-American force was all but indefensible. The only suitable defensive terrain was a low ridge-line 100 yards away. There the landing force could be supported by naval gunfire from *Philadelphia* and *HMS Royalist*.

The rebels had the Marines and bluejackets in a bad spot, and they knew it. If the landing force were to break out of the trap and establish itself on better terrain, someone would have to stay behind to hold off the rebels who were closing in on three sides. Private Hulbert stepped forward and was joined

immediately by Sergeant Michael J. McNally and Sgt Bruno A. Forsterer, who once had been a lieutenant in the German Navy.

An Englishman, an Irishman and a German, they stood their ground against the attackers while the main body withdrew to set up a new defensive position. Wounded,



Henry L. Hulbert

began recruit training. The new recruit excelled at any task he was assigned.

If Henry Hulbert wanted to see action against Spain, those hopes were not realized. His first posting after boot camp was as a member of the Marine Guard, *USS Philadelphia*, First Lieutenant Constantine M. Perkins, commanding. *Phila-*



but firing coolly and methodically, Henry Hulbert took down a pair of charging rebels and speared a third on his bayonet. Then, turning to confront a sword-wielding attacker who was approaching McNally's blind side, Hulbert shot the man at point-blank range.

Even as he fought, Hulbert protected two wounded Navy officers, Lieutenant P. V. Lonsdale and LT J. B. Monaghan. After the two died of their wounds, Hulbert abandoned his position and fell back to the main body one step at a time, firing as he went.

For his actions in Samoa on 1 April 1899, Henry Lewis Hulbert was awarded America's highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor. In addition to noting his extreme courage and bravery, the accompanying citation read in part: "Your conduct as cited above reflects the greatest credit upon you and upon the Marine Corps."

In his official report of the action, then-1stLt Perkins wrote: "The gallantry of Private Henry L. Hulbert, who remained behind at the fence till the last and who

was with Lonsdale and Monaghan when they were both killed, I desire especially to mention. His bravery throughout was worthy of all praise and honor."

In the years that followed, Hulbert's rise through the ranks was sure and steady, corporal, sergeant, gunnery sergeant and first sergeant following in succession. It quickly became apparent that this was a trustworthy and reliable noncommissioned officer, a man admired and respected by seniors and subordinates alike, a man who could be relied upon no matter the circumstances, impeccable in conduct and unerring in judgment. Hulbert set the standard for every rank he held.

By 1910, he served as sergeant major of Marine Barracks and School of Application, Annapolis, Md. During expeditionary duty in Cuba, Hulbert was highly regarded by Colonel George Barnett, who in a few years would become Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps. Barnett would remember the sergeant major who had served him so well.

While Hulbert was at Annapolis, he met Victoria Cecelia Akelitis (the name

originally had been Akalaitis), the daughter of Lithuanian immigrants living in Baltimore. He was 43. She was only 20, but the attraction was immediate and deep. The two were married during September.

George Barnett became Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps 25 Feb. 1914. On 1 May, Col Lincoln Karmany, Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks Washington, D.C., where Henry Hulbert was serving at the time, received what may have been one of the shortest sets of orders ever issued by Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps: "Transfer SgtMaj Hulbert to this Headquarters for duty today."

There was no position of Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps in 1914, but by every standard Hulbert discharged that function. His office was adjacent to MajGen Barnett's office. Anyone wishing to speak with MajGen Barnett first spoke with SgtMaj Hulbert. John W. Thomason would remember Henry Hulbert as "having the manners and bearing of a fine gentleman, and the all-embracing courtesy of an earlier generation."

He also had a daughter, Leila Lilian

Hulbert, born 9 May 1916, and a modest home in Riverdale, Md. Serving on the personal staff of the Major General Commandant as the senior Marine of his rank, Hulbert could be reasonably assured of a career at the highest levels. That would undergo a major upheaval before another year passed.

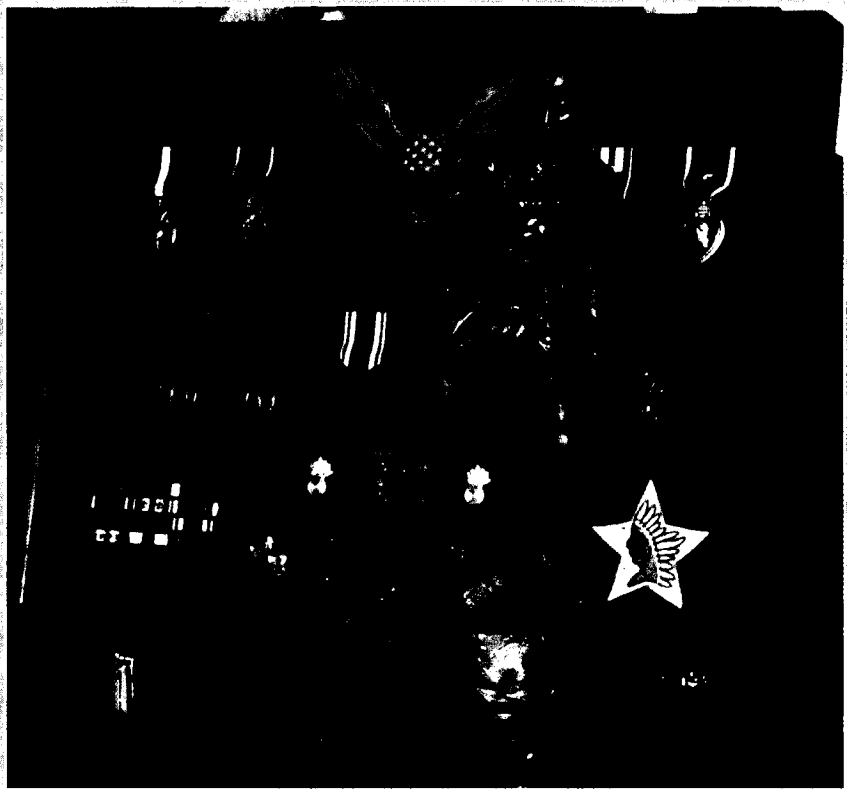
During late 1916 the Marine Corps and the Navy established warrant officer ranks, and Henry Hulbert was designated to take the exam for the new rank of Marine Gunner on 9 Dec. Greatly impressing the members of the examining board at his interview, he subsequently breezed through the written exam with a score of 94.5. With the unanimous approval of all members of the board and with the enthusiastic recommendation of its president, Brigadier General John A. Lejeune, Hulbert's name was forwarded to the Commandant for appointment as a Marine gunner. Hulbert became the first Marine to wear the bursting bomb insignia of rank 28 March 1917, when he was appointed to Marine gunner.

A few weeks later America was at war. President Woodrow Wilson had tried to keep the country out of the war for three years. Then came the discovery that Germany secretly had been encouraging Mexico to invade the American Southwest. President Wilson went before Congress to request a declaration of war against Germany. The declaration passed without debate.

None of that should have affected Henry Hulbert. He was secure in his position at the right hand of the Commandant. He was 50 years old, too old for combat, with a wife and infant daughter at home. However, Henry Hulbert's strong sense of duty would not permit him to sit safely in Washington while others did the fighting. He was that kind of man.

No sooner had MajGen Barnett offered a regiment of Marines for immediate service in France than Hulbert was petitioning his old friend to be included as a member of that regiment. At first MajGen Barnett was reluctant, but in time he gave way. Marine Gunner Henry Hulbert was transferred to the Fifth Marine Regiment, then assembling at the Marine Corps' new base at Quantico, Va., eventually to sail for France aboard the transport *DeKalb*.

At first Hulbert was kept in a safe billet in the rear, but he would have none of that. As the regiment was going through advanced training and learning the ins and outs of combat on the Western Front, Gunner Hulbert kept popping up in the front lines to get in a bit of freelance fighting. The powers that be gave up, and they made Hulbert a platoon leader in the 66th Company (later Co C) of Lieutenant Colonel Julius S. Turrill's 1st Battalion, 5th



First Hulbert Trophy Winner: CWO-3 Gregory L. Snyder

The Marine honored with the first award of the Henry Lewis Hulbert Trophy for Outstanding Leadership is Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gregory L. Snyder, Gunner, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Second Marine Division.

The trophy will be presented by the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the Dec. 4, 2008, Marine Corps Ground Awards Dinner in Crystal City, Va., co-sponsored by the Marine Corps Association and the Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps for Plans, Policies and Operations.

The trophy is a sculpture of Gunner Henry Lewis Hulbert, designed by John Chalk, a former *Leatherneck* magazine staff artist, Marine sergeant and Korean War veteran. Chalk provided his artistic services, including supervision of the bronze castings and finishing of the sculpture, without charge. American Bronze Foundry Inc. of Sanford, Fla., did the molds and casting.

Additional special recognition is due CWO-5 David R. Dunfee, Gunner, The Basic School, Quantico, Va. Gunner Dunfee took the idea of recognizing the best of the best Marine gunners and crafted a Marine Corps order, MCO 1650.49—Hulbert Trophy for Outstanding Leadership—defining the criteria and selection process. He then shepherded that order through often tortuous administrative processes, a heroic feat in itself.

When it came to paying for the production of the 17-inch, 19-pound, all-bronze work of art, retired Marine Gunner Patrick J. "Pat" Woellhof (CWO-5) approached his bosses at Nammo Talley for support. Nammo Talley, well known for its ammunition and other propellant-based products, joined the Marine Corps Association in sponsorship of this annual trophy.

Marine gunners are all "rode hard and put up wet." Many have served in this most challenging assignment since General Alfred M. Gray, 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, reintroduced the billet in 1988 and the first class graduated from The Basic School in 1989. (For historians, the billet was abolished in 1959.)

Now comes a special recognition for a Marine gunner of today. CWO-3 Snyder is the first to be awarded this unique leadership trophy, but he knows he stands in the long shadow of notable Marines stretching back to Henry Lewis Hulbert at Belleau Wood and Blanc Mont. Well done to Gunner Snyder, who was selected while a CWO-2, but also a well done to all Marine gunners, past and present. Your service and sacrifice, including that of your families, is greatly appreciated.

—Col Walt Ford, USMC (Ret)

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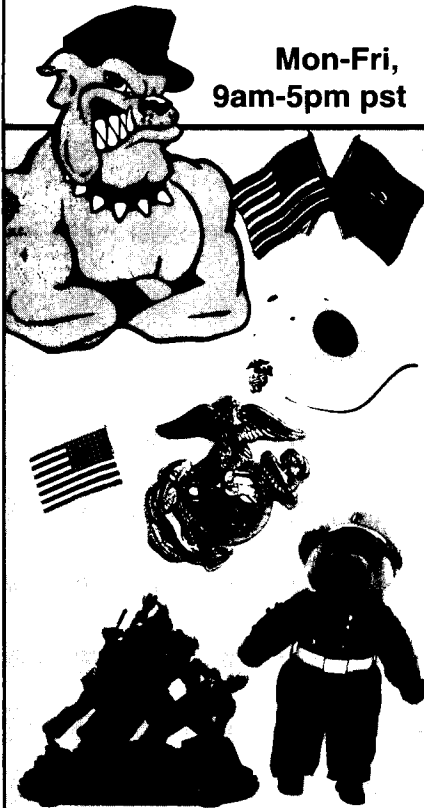
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Marines. It was a wise move. Soon the battalion would need every fighting man it could get.

After an uneventful winter, all hell broke loose during March 1918. The collapse of czarist Russia the previous autumn had released more than a million German troops for employment in France. Fearful that the arrival of a tidal wave of American manpower would tilt the scales against them, the German high command unleashed a massive offensive designed to force Britain and France into a negotiated peace settlement.

By late May the German drive was succeeding all too well. The British and French lines were being pushed backward by an avalanche of shells and masses of infantry. The American field army envisioned by GEN John J. Pershing was nowhere near ready. What was on hand would have to do.

Part of what was on hand was the 2d Division United States Regular, a hybrid division composed of an Army brigade with two infantry regiments, the 9th and 23d Infantry, a Marine brigade built around the 5th and 6th Marines and an engineer regiment and artillery brigade. During the first week of June, the Marine brigade arrived at a place called the *Bois de Belleau*

(Belleau Wood) that had been the hunting preserve of a wealthy French landowner.

Weary, battered French troops passed them streaming to the rear and warned them that "*La guerre est fini*" (The war is over). Told that the only course of action left was to retreat, Captain Lloyd Williams replied with words that have become famous in the Marine Corps: "Retreat? Hell, we just got here." The Marines dug in and waited while the Germans opposite caught their breath and prepared for another lunge.

The Marines beat them to the punch. During the early morning hours of 6 June, elements of both Marine regiments launched an all-out attack on the key German position of Hill 142, setting off what would be a solid month of intense and sustained combat. It also would be the bloodiest day in Marine Corps history up to that point, with more Marines falling dead and wounded than in all of the Marine Corps' previous wars combined.

One of those wounded was Marine Gunner Hulbert. That didn't stop him from leading the attack into the teeth of murderous machine-gun fire, shooting, bayoneting and hurling hand grenades at any unlucky Germans who tried to bar his way. On one occasion he single-handedly blasted



a succession of machine-gun positions, killing seven defenders, and as a subsequent Silver Star citation read, "putting the remainder to flight." A second citation would commend him for continuing to lead his platoon in attacks that routed the defenders of a series of strongpoints despite being painfully wounded.

Yet a third act of conspicuous bravery would lead MG Omar Bundy, USA, commanding general of the 2d Division, to single out Gunner Hulbert for "his extraordinary heroism in leading attacks against enemy positions on June 6th." MG Bundy concluded, "No one could have rendered more valuable service than Gunner Hulbert." For his leadership and undaunted courage during the grinding battle for Belleau Wood, GEN John J. Pershing personally would pin the Distinguished Service Cross to Marine Gunner Henry Hulbert's green blouse.

Further acts of bravery and inspirational leadership at Soissons on 18 July, where he was gassed and wounded yet again, led to a third Silver Star citation. There was as well a commission as second lieutenant and immediate promotion to first lieutenant. No less indicative of Hulbert's stature and character was the admiration of the men young enough to be his sons for his seemingly inexhaustible stamina and endurance and his constant example of the qualities of a Marine. Henry Hulbert, always a leader but never a pusher, asked no man for any effort he wasn't fully prepared to give himself.

Blanc Mont, a dominant terrain feature that controlled the entire front in the vicinity of the old cathedral city of Rheims, had been in German hands since 1914. The Germans had fortified it at their leisure, honeycombing it with an interconnecting network of reinforced concrete bunkers, pillboxes, trenches and deep underground troop billets equipped with electricity, running water and ventilation systems. They fought furiously to maintain possession of it.

In attack after attack the Marine brigade, stoutly assisted by the doughboys of the 9th and 23d Infantry, wrested the ridge from its fiercely resisting defenders. The cost was appalling. Of the slightly more than 1,000 members of the 1st Bn, 5th Marines who jumped off that gray, dreary morning on 4 Oct. 1918, only 134 would walk out under their own power.

One of those left behind was Marine Gunner Hulbert—who recently had been approved for promotion to the rank of captain by the Secretary of the Navy—cut down by a German machine-gunner as he went to reorganize what was left of his platoon for one more push. Always a leader, always courageous, he would be



NANCY LEE WHITE HOFFMAN



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First Lt Henry L. Hulbert is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Section 3, Lot 4309. His widow, Victoria C. Hulbert, christened the destroyer USS *Henry L. Hulbert* (DD-342) just after WW I. The ship was stricken from the Navy list and sold for scrap during 1946, but the ship's bell was saved and now stands on the quarterdeck at The Basic School's Infantry Officer Course at MCB Quantico, Va.

their lives in "The Great War."

Leila Lilian Hulbert, the infant daughter who never really knew her father, grew up in her mother's hometown of Baltimore. She attended Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, graduating with a degree in medicine and a specialty in pathology. She and her husband, William Wells, also a pathologist, established a joint practice in Jacksonville, Fla. Their firstborn son, who eventually became an attorney, was named Henry Hulbert Wells. Since then, the eldest son of each generation has "Hulbert" as his middle name. The memory of Henry Lewis Hulbert, a giant of the Marine Corps, lives on through his descendants.

With the establishment of the Hulbert Trophy for Outstanding Leadership, the memory of Henry Lewis Hulbert will live on in the Marine Corps to which he was dedicated. That seems altogether right and proper.

Editor's note: Al Bevilacqua, a former gunnery sergeant and a retired Marine major whose stories so often appear in Leatherneck, also has written the book, "The Way It Was: A Seabag Full of Marine Humor." His book is available from MCA bookstores. Order online at www.mca-marines.org/onlinestore, or call toll-free (866) 622-1775.

