

GIANT OF A MAN: JACK LUMMUS

By John Gunn

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The Marine Corps lieutenant, after relentlessly leading his platoon against Japanese positions on Iwo Jima for two days and nights and almost single-handedly wiping out three fortifications, stepped on a land mine just before the unit reached its objective in the bitter World War II campaign.

His legs were blown off.

But after Lt. Jack Lummus, 29, of the 27th Marine Division, was carried on a stretcher to an aid station, he told a surprised surgeon, "I guess the New York Giants have lost the services of a damn good end."

His stamina enabled him to remain conscious and he raised himself briefly on an elbow. Through the ordeal, he often smiled. But despite the transfusion of 18 pints of blood, he died from the land-mine blast and earlier wounds on D plus 17 (17 days after D-Day), March 8, 1945. He was among the 1,101 Marine officers and 22,056 enlisted personnel killed or wounded in capturing the 7-square-mile, pork-chop-shaped island and its 1,500 caves and 30 miles of tunnels.

"His dauntless leadership and unwavering devotion to duty throughout sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country," said the Medal of Honor citation signed by President Truman.

From such accounts are legends born.

But Lummus, an end with the Eastern Division champion New York Giants of 1941 and one of two National Football League players to win the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for heroism, largely had been forgotten. Requests to pro sources for information and photographs brought limited responses. And the name "Lummus" is not widely recognized in the Marine Corps.

Had Lummus' "lost an end" words been uttered two years earlier, they might have made the nation's front pages, spurred sales of War Bonds and uplifted sagging morale on the home front. But perhaps because the events of 1945 came so quickly -- Iwo, Okinawa, V-E Day, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, V-J Day -- they were crowded out.

A bronze plaque was dedicated to his memory Dec. 2, 1945, at New York's Polo Grounds during an NFL game, but the stadium has long since been torn down. "I think the plaque is in storage somewhere," said a sister, Mrs. Thomas G. Wright of Ennis, Texas (population 12,110 in the 1980 census), where Lummus grew up, his father was a policeman and a town park is being built in his name.

Ed Croke, director of media services for the Giants, said the plaque and one for tackle Al Blozis, another Giant killed in the war, "were transferred to Yankee Stadium after the Polo Grounds were razed, along with many other things. It's not known what happened to them."

Now the slight to Lummus' memory is changing.

The Marines, as part of the Navy's Maritime Prepositioning Ships program begun in 1979, have named 13 vessels (five of them new, the others modified) after Marine Medal of Honor winners such as Lummus, who played at Baylor, where a memorial light stands in front of the Student Union Building. According to Lt. Grant Newsham, a Marine public affairs officer, the 22,700-ton Motor Vessel 1st Lt. Jack Lummus "completed loading its rolling stock in mid-July" at Port Panama City, Fla."

End Bill Fisk of Corona del Mar, who played at USC and for seven years with the Detroit Lions, San Francisco 49ers and Los Angeles Dons, remembers Lummus. "He was such a great football player. He was big, maybe 6-4. You'd try to block him and you couldn't," Fisk said.

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The other Medal of Honor winner, according to Jim Campbell, formerly of NFL Alumni, is end Maurice Britt of Arkansas and the Lions. The Giants defeated the Lions, Fisk and Britt, 20-13, in 1941.

Jim Lee Howell of Lonoke, Ark., a Giant end from 1937-42 and 1946-48 who coached New York to three Eastern Conference titles and an NFL championship from 1954-60, recalls Lummus as being a "fine person and good football player. Everyone liked him." Lummus played on defense and offense in a one-platoon era. The Giants (8-3) lost 37-9, to the Chicago Bears, considered by many one of the NFL's greatest teams, for the 1941 title two Sundays after the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor.

He also batted .257 in 26 games in 1941 for the Wichita Falls Spudders in the Class D West Texas-New Mexico League.

Another '41 rookie, back George Franck of Rock Island, Ill., a Minnesota All-American, who like Howell saw combat with the Marines in the South Pacific, said Lummus had the "Texas pride, self-assurance and the ability showing it was just not talk."

In his book "Iwo Jima" (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), Richard F. Newcomb wrote of the fateful March 1945 day, "Suddenly he (Lummus) was at the center of a powerful explosion, obscured by flying rock and dirt. As it cleared, his men saw him rising as if in a hole. A land mine had blown off both his legs that had carried him to football honors at Baylor.

"They watched in horror as he stood on the bloody stumps, calling them on. Several men, crying now, ran to him and, for a moment, talked of shooting him to stop the agony.

"But he was still shouting for them to move out, move out, and the platoon scrambled forward. Their tears turned to rage, they swept an incredible 300 yards over the impossible ground and at nightfall were on the ridge, overlooking the sea.

"There was no question that the dirty, tired men, cursing and crying and fighting, had done it for Jack Lummus."

That night he was buried by his men at the base of 550-foot Mount Suribachi.

* * * *

JACK LUMMUS

End

Born October 22, 1917, at Ennis, TX

Died March 8, 1945, on Iwo Jima

Height: 6-3 1/2 Weight: 194

College: Baylor (lettered 1939-40)

Signed as free agent with New York Giants 1941

Played in 1941 NFL Championship Game

U.S. Marine Corps 1942-45; Received Medal of Honor

<u>Year</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>LG</u>	<u>Gm/St</u>	<u>PC</u>	<u>YDS</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>TD</u>
1941	New York Giants N	10/ 0	1	5	5.0	0