

Way We Were

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Uncommon Valor

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The United States Marine Corps War Memorial is located on a high ridge overlooking the nation's capital. Not far from Arlington National Cemetery, the memorial is dedicated to all U. S. Marines who have given their lives for their country. Inscribed in gold letters on the polished black granite front of the memorial are the words: "Uncommon Valor Was A Common Virtue." No marine personifies those words more than Private Frank Edward Peterson, 2nd Division, 18th Company, 5th Regiment.

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered the First World War. Ten days later, while visiting relatives in Salt Lake City, Frank Peterson enlisted in the Marine Corps and immediately reported for recruit training with Company "C" at the Mare Island, California marine barracks. At the time, the twenty-five year old Peterson was working on his father's farm in Snyderville and completing his third year of schooling at Brigham Young University.

Frank was the first of ten children born to Charles J. and Mary Peterson. By 1910, the family had moved from Draper, Utah to the family farm near Park City with Frank often making the three mile hike over the mountain to attend high school. The Park Record called young Peterson a sterling, manly man; admired and beloved by all in the community who knew him.

The Peterson family never saw Frank again after he left for Mare Island. From there he was transferred to the marine base in Quantico, Virginia at the end of June 1917. In July, he was assigned to the 18th Company of the 5th Marine Regiment, the most highly decorated regiment in the Marine Corps.

In June 1918, Private Peterson's Marine Corps Second Division was tasked with capturing a fiercely defended, mile square French hunting preserve from the Imperial German Army. The Battle of Bois de Belleau, or Belleau Wood is one of the most legendary battles in Marine Corps history. This battle exemplified the Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage, and dedication. This response to the German Spring Offensive that threatened Paris was the first real taste of battle for the U.S. Marines in World War I.

The story of Frank E. Peterson's valor on June 12, 1918 is so compelling it became a part of the USMC Recruiters Bulletin. At 6:00 p.m., the 5th regiment achieved a breakthrough in the northern third of the wood, but was exposed to an artillery barrage with great quantities of mustard gas. As the marines advanced through deadly German machine gun fire, "Private Frank E. Peterson, Park City, Utah, started up carrying a fifty-pound Chauchat rifle. One ammunition carrier dropped wounded. Peterson shouldered the heavy clips. A minute later a second carrier dropped. Peterson added the ammunition to his own burden and reached the spot picked out for him, packing the rifle and all the ammunition."

There Peterson was gravely wounded. United States Marine Corps, Private Frank Edward Peterson passed away at 10:50 p.m. two days later, on Flag Day, June 14.



Photo ID: digi.2.2103 (1999.17.74)

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Himes-Buck Digital Collection

Caption: It took years and, eventually, a Public Works Administration grant to fund the construction of the Veteran's War Memorial Building, now Park City Live on Main Street. Local legionnaires, whose post is named for Frank Peterson, gathered to ceremonially lay the cornerstone in 1937 (pictured). In 1940, the building was completed and dedicated.