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March 21, 2000

The Honorable Paula M. DeLaney
Mayor of Gainesville
P. O. Box 490-19
Gainesville, FL 32602-0490

Dear Mayor DeLaney:

It is with pleasure that we, the School Board of Alachua County, support the Marine Corps League's effort to honor Milton Lewis, Gainesville's highest decorated veteran of World War II.

The School Board is the primary user of Citizen's Field through a long-term lease with the city. It would be an honor to have the name and heroic deeds of Milton Lewis remembered by the students and citizens of Gainesville by holding activities and events in the Milton Lewis Stadium.

The School Board of Alachua County, Florida does hereby endorse the designation of the stadium at Citizen's Field as the Milton Lewis Stadium.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Sharpe, Chairman

Judy C. Brashear, Vice-chairman

Beverly P. Carroll, Member

William H. Cake, Member

Chester W. Leathers, Member

Lawrence L. Marazza, Superintendent



ALACHUA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Partners for a Productive
Community Office
Director

February 18, 2000

Paula Delaney, Mayor
City of Gainesville
200 E. University Ave.
Gainesville, FL 32601

Dear Mayor Delaney,

Members of the Alachua County Veterans Advisory Board have voted unanimously to support the Marine Corps League's effort to designate the stadium, at Citizens Field, the Milton Lewis Stadium. This board, comprised of leaders from our veteran community, request your support and guidance with this most worthy project.

Milton Lewis remains the city's most highly decorated veteran, of the thousands from Gainesville, who have gone off to serve our country. He was posthumously awarded our nations second highest award for valor, the Navy Cross, for "extraordinary heroism...in WWII". Corporal Lewis was so well thought of that the U.S. Navy named a destroyer after him as well. Anything you and other members of the City Commission could do to assist in this endeavor would be greatly appreciated.

Thank You,


Carl McDaniel, Chairman
Alachua County Veterans Advisory Board

JL/clG:\VET\LETTERS\PDelaney.wpd





The Gainesville Florida, Chapter
of The Retired Officer Association, Inc.
Post Office Box 5034
Gainesville, Florida 32627-5034



1 March 2000

To Whom It May Concern,



The 171 Members and 54 Auxiliary Members of the Gainesville Chapter of the Retired Officers Association, Inc. endorse and support the efforts to designate the stadium, at Citizens Field, *The Milton Lewis Stadium*.



Corporal Milton Lewis, United States Marine Corps, was a resident of Gainesville. He was highly decorated by the Marine Corps and was killed during World War I while defending the freedoms we all enjoy today. He was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism in combat". He also received the distinction of having an U.S. Navy Destroyer Escort named for him, an honor that is only given to those soldiers whose actions were in the finest traditions of the U.S. Military.



I encourage you to honor this Gainesville resident and hero by designating Citizens Field, *The Milton Lewis Stadium*. When we forget our history we ignore our future.



Sincerely,

ROBERT E. BURFORD
CW3, USA (Ret)
President



March 15, 2000

Jim Lynch
Alachua County Service Officer
Veterans Services
730 N. Waldo Road, Building B, Suite 100
Gainesville, FL 32641-3618

Dear Jim,

I, and the members of my organization, support the designation of the stadium at Citizens Field as Milton Lewis Stadium. This highly decorated U. S. Marine Corps veteran gave his life for our country, and as one of Gainesville's true heroes, it is fitting that Cpl. Lewis be recognized in this manner. We enthusiastically support this patriot endeavor, and look forward to participating in any way we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Robert G. McLendon, Jr.,
Commander,
Madison Starke Perry Camp 1424,
Sons of Confederate Veterans

P. O. Box 12775
Gainesville, FL 32604-0775
(904) 462-4099

Florida Department of Military Affairs



Special Archives Publication Number

17

A FLORIDA COUNTY'S WAR
ALACHUA COUNTY GOES TO WAR

State Arsenal
St. Francis
Barracks
St. Augustine,
Florida

MILTON LEWIS

Corporal, 270365, U.S. Marine Corps
Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine
Division, Fleet Marine Force
Killed in action, 7 August 1942, Tulagi, Solomon Islands

Milton Lewis was born 8 July 1920 in Gainesville, Florida. He was raised in that city, attended Gainesville High School and played football for the school team. He was also an excellent swimmer, winning many awards at Silver Springs, Florida. He left high school before graduation and joined the Marine Corps in 1938. Later, he earned his high school diploma while in service. Lewis completed basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina. While a Marine, he won several awards for marksmanship and tactical employment of rifle, pistol and both light and heavy machine guns. Prior to America's entry into the war, Lewis saw duty in the eastern U.S., Puerto Rico and at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. At the time of his death his next of kin included;

Mr. and Mrs. William F. Lewis, parents, Miss Agnes Lewis, Mrs. Dorothy Chamberlain, sisters and Albert V. Lewis, brother, all of Gainesville, Florida.

The Fifth Marines were at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba when the war began. After further training and after being brought to war strength, the regiment was sent to Wellington, New Zealand to await employment in America's first offensive in the Pacific, the assault on the Solomon Islands. On the 7th of August 1942, the members of the 1st Marine Division made simultaneous landings on Guadalcanal and Tulagi Islands in the Solomons. Initially, the landings on Guadalcanal were un-opposed but those at Tulagi and neighboring islets were violently opposed by Japanese Imperial forces of the Third Kure Special Landing Force. It was during the first day's fighting for control of the ravine separating the island's principal defensive positions on hills 208 and 281 that Milton Lewis was killed.

For his actions that day, Milton Lewis received the Navy Cross, a citation for which read as follows;

For extraordinary heroism as a member of the First Marine Division in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands area on August 7th, 1942:
With courageous disregard for his own safety, Corporal Lewis determinedly led his squad against a hostile machine gun position which threatened to halt his unit's advance. Despite his imminent peril, he tenaciously continued his relentless fighting, although fatally wounded, so inspired his men that they succeeded in silencing the enemy gun, thereby removing this perilous obstacle. Corporal Lewis's unswerving devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

Corporal Lewis's remains were temporarily interred in the U.S.

Looking for a way to honor a WW II vet

Cpl. Milton Lewis was the first Gainesville man killed in battle in World War II, and according to Jim Lynch, the Alachua County veterans officer, he was also one its highest decorated.

But if you look around town, a name on a headstone at Evergreen Cemetery and his listing on the county veterans memorial are about the only public places you'll find Lewis' name mentioned.

Lynch and a group of veterans hope to change that. He says the idea follows the same plan the University of Florida uses to honor mega-donor Ben Hill Griffin, whose name is now attached to the stadium at Florida Field. Lynch's proposal is to name the stadium at Citizens Field for the decorated vet, making it Milton Lewis Stadium at Citizens Field.



**GARY
KIRKLAND**

Attempts to honor the Marine who was killed on the island of Tulagi have run into unfortunate difficulties in the past. Lynch says the group is also hoping to locate any of Lewis' surviving family members — sis-

ters, nephews, nieces — but that hasn't been easy, either.

"I called every Lewis in the phone book and nobody knew anything about him," says Bob Gasche, a member of the Gator Detachment of the Marine Corps League of Gainesville that is supporting the effort.

KIRKLAND continued on Page 2D

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Lewis grew up in Gainesville; his parents, Mr. and Mrs. William F. Lewis, lived at what was then 1318 E. University Ave. He played guard on the Gainesville High School football team. Buster Bishop, who would later coach at GHS and at the University of Florida, remembers Lewis as a teammate.

"A plain good boy" is how Bishop describes Lewis, not flashy, not mischievous. "A very quiet boy, a good student, well liked."

Bill Hartan knew him in elementary and high school.

"A big friendly tough guy," he says of Lewis. "He could physically handle about anything that came along, I guess that's why he went in the Marine Corps."

He left high school before graduating to join the Marines in February 1939. He was stationed at



Lewis

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. His unit was later moved to the Western Pacific, and on Aug. 7, 1942, he and his fellow Marines were part of the first offensive action of the war, the invasion of Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

Tulagi is a small volcanic dot on the globe, 12,000 miles from Gainesville. Lewis would come ashore that day with his fellow Marines. He was 22, and it was his first battle — it would also be his last.

The Nov. 10, 1943, citation from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, in posthumously presenting Lewis with the Navy Cross, read:

"For extraordinary heroism as a member of the First Marine Division in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands Area on August 7, 1942. With courageous disregard for his own safety, Corporal Lewis determinedly led his squad against a hostile machine-gun position, which threatened to halt his unit's advance.

"Despite his imminent peril, he tenaciously continued his relentless fighting and although fatally wounded, so inspired his men that they succeeded in silencing the enemy gun, thereby removing this perilous obstacle.

"Corporal Lewis's unswerving devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

These details weren't known at home until long after the battle. His death — although he was Gainesville's first battle casualty of the war — didn't make front-page news. News traveled slowly across the Pacific, so his own family didn't learn that he'd died until nearly a month later.

His receiving a Purple Heart and the Navy Cross did make headlines, and the Navy's decision to name a destroyer-escort in his honor seemed to give Gainesville's hometown hero some much-deserved

recognition. But that story would have an unusual twist.

His mother would christen the ship with a bottle of champagne on Aug. 6, 1944, in Tampa. The USS Milton Lewis, DE 772, "a 300-ton greyhound of the ocean" splashed mightily into the water, ... the fighting spirit of a Gainesville Marine hero was ready for fitting before stalking submarines," read the newspaper account.

But that never happened. On Sept. 11, the Navy cancelled the completion of the ship. It's only ocean voyage was to an Oct. 25, 1944, date with a scrappy yard in Charleston, S.C.

In Gainesville, efforts were a little more successful. The city named a softball field in his honor. Tax Collector Jim Bishop says he remembers playing many games at Lewis Field, which was located near the current Martin Luther King Center.

But Lewis Field has long since faded into history. The city's airport does carry the name of another Gainesville World War II vet, John Alison, an Army Air Corps pilot who earned the title "ace" by shooting down a dozen Japanese planes. Maybe Lewis, one of Alachua County's most highly decorated vets, deserves a similar honor, Lynch says.

"We feel we need to remember those who sacrificed for others," Lynch says.

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