

Part of Wilson's War Was Captured on Film

Before the advent of nightly network news programs, motion picture newsreels were a main source of news—at least for Americans who attended the movies. Before the main feature rolled, movie-goers would view the latest footage from around the globe, courtesy of Fox Movietone, Paramount, Universal and other newsreel producers.

In March 1945, McIver Wilson had traveled from his home in Sumter to Washington, DC, perhaps on business. While in the capital city, Wilson decided to take in a picture at a local theater. *Without Love* starring Spencer Tracey and Katherine Hepburn and *The Clock* featuring younger stars Judy Garland and Robert Walker were among the films showing in theaters that month.

The lights dimmed and the newsreel began. When the film showed images of American Marines landing on the Japanese-held island of Iwo Jima, Wilson's attention must have been riveted to the screen: his son was assigned to the 4th Marine Division, one of the three Marine divisions of the Vth Amphibious Corps assaulting the island. As the elder Wilson watched in the darkened theater, he saw his son, Haynie, land on that beach some 7,000 miles distant.



Haynie McIver Wilson captained the football team his senior year and graduated from Sumter High School in 1937. He enrolled at Clemson College as a textile engineering major in the Class of 1941, but it is unclear how long he remained on campus.

Before enlisting with the Marines in June 1944, Wilson was employed by the Atlantic Coastline Railroad. His military training began at Parris Island, South Carolina and continued at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina before he headed west to Camp Pendleton, California. He shipped out to the Pacific that November.

The battle for Iwo Jima was an all-Marine affair. The 3rd, 4th and newly activated 5th Marine Divisions combined under the command of the Vth Amphibious Corps to root out the island's deeply entrenched and well-fortified Japanese defenders. The first landings on February 19, 1945 were unopposed. The Marine attackers walked across the black sand beaches and headed inland before the hidden defenders opened up with accurate and deadly machine gun, mortar and artillery fire. Only the discipline and leadership of the Marines enabled them to struggle forward. As they captured key positions, the Marines often were attacked from the rear or from their flanks as the Japanese utilized an extensive system of interconnected tunnels to burrow beneath and behind their attackers. In this 360 degree battle, the Marines suffered 26,000 casualties, including 6,800 dead—the only battle of the Pacific in which American casualties outnumbered Japanese.

On March 11, the 4th Division combat log reported that while enemy resistance had been broken, the Japanese were continuing their passive defense from “an intricate system of well concealed caves...[which] were generally disclosed only when the enemy opened fire.” The log also noted the somber statistic that the Division’s combat efficiency had been reduced to “an estimated 38%.”

One of the Americans who fell that day was Haynie McIver Wilson, whose father, through the lens of the newsreel camera, had witnessed his son’s first step onto that fateful island. In addition to his parents, Wilson was survived by his wife, the former Connie Stevens of Hartsville, two sisters and his brother Ralph, then serving as a US Navy petty officer in the Pacific.

