

# THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

## The Story of a Cryptologic Hero Maj. James W. Ayers



**"Capt. Ayers was one of the finest individuals I ever had the pleasure of knowing. He was a compassionate and caring human being."**

Posted by Cpl. Gary C. Farkas USMC on Tribute Site

Captain James Westley Ayers was born October 31, 1934 in "the Lowcountry's hometown," Moncks Corner, South Carolina. Located in the southeast corner of the state, the region is bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by the Savannah River and the state of Georgia. He attended Berkeley High School, where he developed a reputation as a bit of a renaissance man. In addition to excelling on the gridiron for the football team, he also sang in the school's glee club and served as a class officer during his senior year.

After graduation in 1952, he entered the Citadel in the fall of that year and began his military career. During his college years he excelled academically, continued to stay fit with a regimen of daily long-distance runs, and most importantly developed the sterling leadership skills that he would come to be known for. Knowing firsthand the challenges faced by first-year students at the school, Jim devoted himself to assisting members of the freshman class with their studies and helping them adjust to the demands of military life.

He graduated from the Citadel in 1957 with a degree in political science, and soon after was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. As a communications officer, his job was to command, or assist in commanding, a communication unit or element in the planning, installation, operation, displacement and maintenance of data, telecommunication, and computer systems. In addition, he was trained in cryptologic operations. His career took him to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as well as several Marine installations in Florida. Jim enjoyed his work and took advantage of every opportunity to excel. He volunteered to serve in Vietnam, was selected for Major in 1966, and by 1967 had served three tours "in country."

While on his third tour in Vietnam, Jim became the S-3 (planning, training, control officer) of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines in Chu Lai. In April 1967, the unit had been part of "Operation Union," an effort that had inflicted severe damage to North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces operating in the Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces. A month later, "Operation Hastings" was implemented with the aim of destroying the remnants of the remaining enemy units in the area. On May 26th, after being airlifted into the battle space, Jim and his fellow Marines discovered that a well-entrenched regiment-sized element had reoccupied the area, and a pitched battle ensued. Fighting continued throughout the day but by late afternoon, the Marines had vanquished the enemy. Sadly, during the heavy fighting Captain Ayers was killed in action during a mortar attack. He was, and is, the highest ranking Naval Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) officer to be killed in action.



Jim is buried in the cemetery of St. John the Baptist Church, about 300 yards from the house where he was born on Sugar Hill Road. To honor his memory, every year the student with the highest grade point average in the Signal Intelligence Officer Course at the Navy Marine Corps Intelligence Center in Dam Neck, Virginia is presented with the "James W Ayers Honor Graduate Award."

Captain James W. Ayers' two passions in life were taking care of those placed under his command and the United States Marine Corps. A fellow Marine noted that "He was a good commanding officer and always had his men at heart. I had a number of captains while I was in the Marine Corps, but he was such a special person to me that when I tell anyone of my time in the Marine Corps I think of him and only him as 'MY CAPTAIN.'" Another put it more simply: "He was truly a Marine's Marine." It is in this spirit that we honor and remember his service and sacrifice to the Corps, the cryptologic service, and his nation.

