

## James Dennis LaBelle

### Born

November 22, 1925,

Columbia Heights, Anoka County, Minnesota

### Entered Service - WWII

November 18, 1943 U. S. Marine Corps Reserve,

Minneapolis, MN



### Died

March 8, 1945, Iwo Jima, Tokyo Metropolis, Japan.

### Early Years

James LaBelle was born in Columbia Heights, Minnesota on November 22, 1925. He attended grammar school and played basketball and baseball. His favorite hobby was the raising of homing pigeons. At the Columbia Heights High School, he starred on the basketball, baseball and boxing teams. His vocational courses were in woodwork and metalwork. During summer vacations, he worked as an apprentice acetylene welder for a local air conditioning corporation.

### Marine Corps Service

At 17 years of age, with his mother's permission, LaBelle enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve in Minneapolis, MN. His recruit training was at the Marine Corps Base, In San Diego, California.

At Camp Pendleton, California, he qualified in the intensive combat training course before embarking for overseas. He joined the regimental Weapons Company, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, on June 30, 1944. In August, he sailed on board the USS George F. Elliott, bound for Hilo, Hawaii and eventually to Iwo Jima.

At Camp Tarawa, a Marine camp in Hawaii, the regimental Weapons Company, he engaged in more indoctrination and training preparatory to actual combat.

Private LaBelle's first battle was taking part in the assault on Iwo Jima, which began on February 19, 1945. This was after aerial and naval forces had pounded its desolate surface for many days, the island of Iwo Jima felt the sting of invading Marine amphibious forces. One of thousands, PFC LaBelle fought continuously from the initial landing until March 8, 1945. At this time, PFC

LaBelle jumped onto a live grenade to protect two other soldiers in his foxhole. He gallantly gave his life and earned the highest honor his nation could bestow. He was only nineteen years old. The family did not receive official word of his death for another three months.

Private James LaBelle was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. His mother was presented the Medal of Honor by BGen William E. Riley, then Director of Marine Corps Public Information, in a ceremony at Minneapolis's Powderhorn Park on July 21, 1946. James Dennis LaBelle is one of ten Minnesotans to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during World War II.

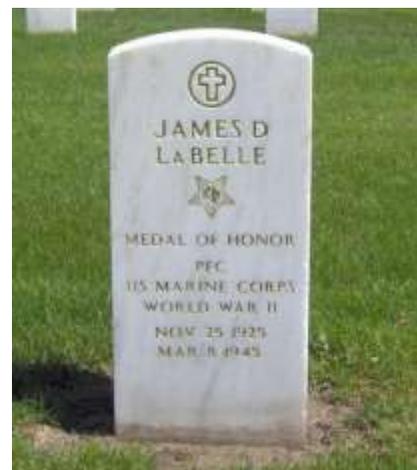
Private First Class James D. LaBelle citation reads:

“For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the Weapons Company, Twenty-seventh Marines, Fifth Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the seizure of Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, 8 March 1945. Filling a gap in the front lines during a critical phase of the battle, Private First Class LaBelle had dug into a foxhole with two other Marines and grimly aware of the enemy's persistent attempts to blast a way through our lines with hand grenades, applied himself with steady concentration to maintaining a sharply vigilant watch during the hazardous night hours. Suddenly a hostile grenade landed beyond reach in his foxhole. Quickly estimating the situation, he determined to save the others if possible, shouted a warning and instantly dived on the missile, absorbing the exploding charge in his own body and thereby protecting his comrades from serious injury. Stouthearted and indomitable, he had unhesitatingly relinquished his own chance of survival that his fellow Marines might carry on the relentless fight against a fanatic enemy and, his dauntless courage, cool decision and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of certain death reflect the highest credit upon Private First Class LaBelle and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.”

Private First Class LaBelle's remains were returned to the United States in late 1948, and were reinterred in the cemetery in **Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota**, Plot: Section B1, Grave 422-S.

**Compiled by Glynæ Deschene  
Maria Sanford Chapter DAR**

Resources  
Find A Grave  
Wikipedia  
United States Marine Corps History Division



## **Memorial**

James D. La Belle is one of three Minnesota Medal of Honor Recipients from the Northeast Twin Cities who are named on the Anoka County Veteran's memorial at Bunker Hills Anoka County Park in Coon Rapids, Minnesota. The other two are Richard E. Kraus and Richard K. Sorenson.