

# Eugenous Melker Hovatter

U.S. Marine Corps, Colonel

1917 - 1993

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Eugenous “Gene” Melker Hovatter, lovingly referred to as “Colonel” by family and friends, was born on October 30, 1917, in Grafton, West Virginia. At the time of his birth, Grafton was a bustling city and important transportation hub. The course of Eugenous’s eventful life took him across the globe, far from the steep mountains and winding river bends of Grafton, and he eventually died on a hunting excursion in Wyoming. After his passing, his remains returned to the town of his birth, bringing full circle a long, adventurous legacy.

Census records show that parents James and Mary Alice Miller Hovatter raised Gene and his siblings on a farm in Grafton. Today, Grafton is a small town in rural Taylor County, West Virginia, but in 1917, it was a booming railroad hub for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. During this time of relative prosperity for Grafton, Hovatter’s family likely did not profit much—money would have been stretched thin supporting ten children, of which Eugenous was the second youngest.



Eugenous Hovatter (center right), then a major in the Marine Corps, administers the oath of enlistment to new recruits in Pennsylvania in 1959. At the time, Hovatter was the chief Marine recruiting officer in central Pennsylvania. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 October 1959, via *Newspapers.com*

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According to his obituary, he graduated from Grafton High School. Emerging into adulthood in the midst of the Great Depression may have influenced his decision to join the military.

Gene enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in October 1939. He trained at Marine Corps Barracks, Washington D.C. It is unclear whether he saw combat during World War II. By October 1944, Sergeant Hovatter entered officer training at Quantico. In 1946, as a first lieutenant, he was part of a Marine detachment based in Yokosuka, Japan during the post-war occupation.

Whether he first saw action during World War II, it was the Korean War that cemented Hovatter's Marine Corps mettle. By this time he was the commanding officer of Able Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division (abbreviated 1/7). It was in this role, pitted against overwhelming Chinese Communist forces at the infamous Chosin Reservoir, that Lt. Hovatter earned the Silver Star.

After the North Korean People's Army's (KPA) invasion of South Korea in June 1950 signalled the beginning of the conflict, United Nations forces were able to recover and pursue the KPA almost back to North Korea's border with China. The U.N. victory nearly turned to defeat, however, when Chinese troops crossed the border and attacked, achieving complete surprise.

By late November 1950, a force of about 30,000 United Nations personnel were surrounded by 120,000 Chinese Communist troops at the Chosin Reservoir, a man-made lake about 185 miles northeast of Pyongyang, North Korea. U.S. troops included a large contingent of Marines from the 1st Division—including Lt. Hovatter's Able Company. On November 28, in snow and freezing temperatures, Able Company was tasked with rescuing Charlie Company, which was under attack by the Chinese and had been cut off from the other U.N. forces.

First Lieutenant Eugenous M. Hovatter personally led Able Company's advance, crossing difficult terrain to reach the beleaguered Charlie Company. Chinese resistance was dogged. Even after five hours of fighting, Able Company still found themselves a mile from Charlie Company's position. Refusing to abandon their fellow

### SILVER STAR MEDALS (First Award)

LtCol. John F. Kinney  
LtCol. Claude H. Welch  
Capt. William J. Rainwater  
Capt. Valdemar Schmidt, Jr.  
Capt. William F. Simpsen, Jr. (Posthumous)  
Capt. Arthur Wagner  
1stLt. Eugenous M. Hovatter  
2ndLt. Robert E. Buchmann  
2ndLt. Richard E. Carey  
MSgt. Floyd E. Compton  
MSgt. Paul A. Hodge  
MSgt. Ernest Roessner (Posthumous)  
SSgt. Edward N. Daugherty  
SSgt. James B. Nash  
SSgt. Charles M. Schmidt  
Sgt. William L. Holemon  
Sgt. William S. Johnson  
Sgt. Charles H. Poorman  
Sgt. Howard R. Rasberry  
Corp. Billy J. Palge  
Corp. Andrew E. Vollo (Posthumous)  
Pfc Rowan D. Atwood (Posthumous)  
Pfc Hugo V. Baccari (Posthumous)  
Pfc Robert N. Blevins  
Pfc Robert L. Bowers, Jr. (Posthumous)  
Pfc George E. Buckethorpe  
Pfc Francis J. Devine  
Pfc Jans F. Hursey (Posthumous)  
Pfc Walter F. Kasterko  
Pfc Charles M. Kaylor  
Pfc Anthony Marcatanto  
Pfc John F. McQuade  
Pfc Wilburn D. Pirtle  
Pfc Jack D. Trader (Posthumous)  
Pvt. Jack S. Fischer  
Pvt. Bernard E. Metivier

Lt. Hovatter's name is listed for the Silver Star in the Marine Corps' *Leatherneck Magazine*, January 1952.  
*Archive.org*

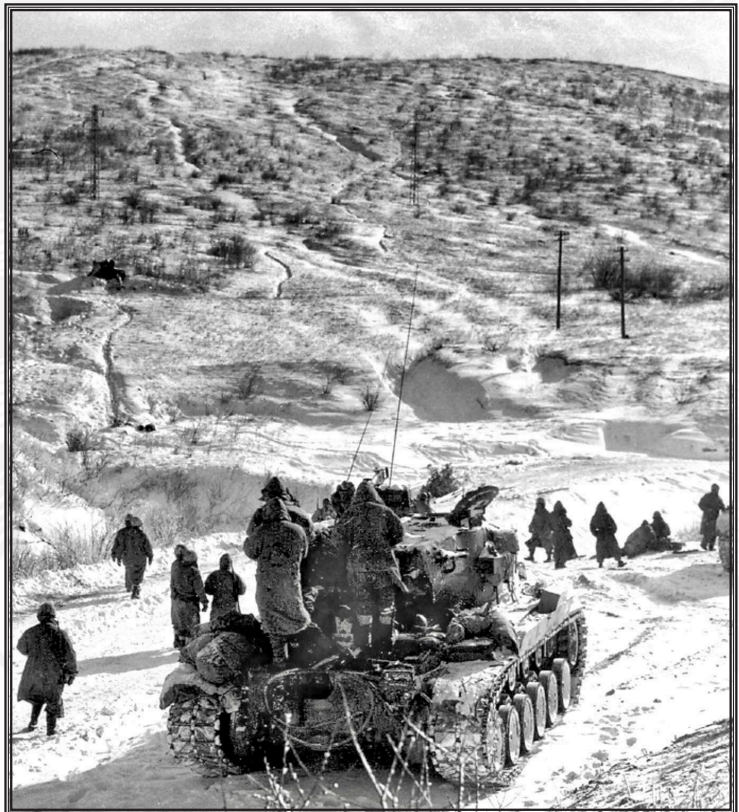
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Marines, Hovatter's Able Company linked up with 1/7's Baker Company, and together the two units pushed through to Charlie Company. For his perseverance in rescuing Baker, and for his personal bravery, Eugenous was awarded a Bronze Star and a Silver Star in 1950 "for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity... in action against enemy aggressor forces in Korea."

Returning to the United States after the war, Hovatter was eventually promoted to colonel and placed in charge of a large Marine recruitment district in eastern and central Pennsylvania. He was based out of Philadelphia but frequently made visits to local recruiting centers throughout his region. The facilities in Hovatter's recruiting stations were also known for their amenities, which included air conditioning and televisions. Between 1960 and 1968, Hovatter was directing recruitment in the entire tri-state area, which encompassed eastern and central Pennsylvania as well as Delaware and southern New Jersey. Many of the Marines he recruited would go on to fight in Vietnam.

Eugenous had married Doris Elizabeth Kaiser Hovatter on July 4, 1941, before the United States entered World War II. After his retirement from the Marine Corps in 1968, the couple lived out much of their lives back in West Virginia, where they made a home in Preston County. They had no children. For the rest of his life, Eugenous worked in general construction and maintained a small farm.

Eugenous Melker Hovatter died of natural causes in Sweetwater County, Wyoming while on a hunting expedition in 1993. According to family members, he had shot an elk and suffered a heart attack while retrieving it. He left behind his wife, Doris, who was reunited with him in death on October 7, 2002. They are buried together in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



**Soldiers of the 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division advance with armored support during the breakout from Chosin Reservoir in December 1950. *Wikimedia***





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## Sources

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# Eugenous Melker Hovatter

## Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery  
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354  
(304) 265-2044

Section 1  
Site 1395

Date of interment: October 11, 1993

## About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

**Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council**  
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