

MEDAL OF HONOR: CHARLES E. KELLY

Medal of Honor Series

Our "Medal of Honor" series explores the stories behind the courageous Pennsylvania veterans who have been awarded the prestigious Medal of Honor for their exemplary service in the United States military. In this entry, we recognize the achievements of Charles E. Kelly, who received the Medal of Honor on February 18, 1944.



Charles E. Kelly joined the Army in Pittsburgh in May 1942, and by September 13, 1943 was serving as a Corporal in Company L, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division. Kelly was the first enlisted man to be decorated with the Medal of Honor for action on the European continent.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, Charles E. Kelly was awarded the Medal of Honor. On 13 September 1943, near Altavilla, Italy, Cpl. Kelly voluntarily joined a patrol that located and neutralized enemy machine gun positions. After this hazardous duty, he volunteered to establish contact with a battalion of U.S. infantry that was believed to be located on Hill 315, a mile distant. He traveled over a route commanded by enemy observation and under sniper, mortar, and artillery fire. Later, he returned with the correct information that the enemy occupied Hill 315 in organized positions. Immediately thereafter Cpl. Kelly, again a volunteer patrol member, assisted materially in the destruction of two enemy machine gun nests under conditions requiring great skill and courage. Having effectively fired his weapon until all the ammunition was exhausted, he secured permission to obtain more at an ammunition dump. Arriving at the dump, which was located near a storehouse on the extreme flank of his regiment's position, Cpl. Kelly found that the Germans were attacking ferociously at this point. He obtained his ammunition and was given the mission of protecting the rear of the storehouse. He held his position throughout the night. The following morning the enemy attack was resumed. Cpl. Kelly took a position at an open window of the storehouse. One

machine gunner had been killed at this position and several other soldiers wounded. Cpl. Kelly delivered continuous aimed and effective fire upon the enemy with his automatic rifle until the weapon locked from overheating. Finding another automatic rifle, he again directed effective fire upon the enemy until this weapon also locked. At this critical point, with the enemy threatening to overrun the position, Cpl. Kelly picked up 60 mm mortar shells, pulled the safety pins, and used the shells as grenades, killing at least 5 of the enemy. When it became imperative that the house be evacuated, Cpl. Kelly, despite his sergeant's injunctions, volunteered to hold the position until the remainder of the detachment could withdraw. As the detachment moved out, Cpl. Kelly was observed deliberately loading and firing a rocket launcher from the window. He was successful in covering the withdrawal of the unit, and later in joining his own organization. Cpl. Kelly's fighting determination and intrepidity in battle exemplify the highest traditions of the U.S. Armed Forces.