

MEDAL OF HONOR: GINO J. MERLI

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 Gino J. Merli, who received the Medal of Honor on August 4, 1945.



Gino J. Merli was a private first class and machine gunner with the 18th Infantry of the 1st Infantry Division. Pfc. Merli was born in Scranton, PA and entered the service at Peckville, PA.

Pfc. Merli was serving as a machine gunner in the vicinity of Sars la Bruyere, Belgium, on the night of 4 - 5 September 1944, when his company was attacked by a superior German force. Its position was overrun and he was surrounded when our troops were driven back by overwhelming numbers and firepower. Disregarding the fury of the enemy fire concentrated on him, he maintained his position, covering the withdrawal of our riflemen and breaking the force of the enemy pressure. His assistant machine gunner was killed and the position captured; the other 8 members of the section were forced to surrender. Pfc. Merli slumped down beside the dead assistant gunner and feigned death. No sooner had the enemy group withdrawn then he was up and firing in all directions. Once more, his position was taken and the captors found two apparently lifeless bodies. Throughout the night, Pfc. Merli stayed at his weapon. By daybreak, the enemy had suffered heavy losses, and as our troops launched an assault, asked for a truce. Our negotiating party, who accepted the German surrender, found Pfc. Merli still at his gun. On the battlefield lay 52 enemy dead, 19 of whom were directly in front of the gun. Pfc. Merli's gallantry and courage, and the losses and confusion that he caused the enemy, contributed materially to our victory.

Merli, who had participated in the D-day invasion of Normandy, later fought in the Battle of the Bulge. He was wounded three times during the war, taking hits to his leg and wrists during the Battle of the Bulge and, on that road in Belgium, four wounds to his buttocks when German soldiers prodded him with their bayonets to see if he was dead.

After the war, he served as an administrator for the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Plains Township, PA. He passed away in June 2002.