

MEDAL OF HONOR: HAROLD O. MESSERSCHMIDT

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 Harold O. Messerschmidt, who received the Medal of Honor on July 17, 1946.



Harold Messerschmidt joined the Army from Chester, PA in May 1943, and by September 17, 1944 was serving as a Sergeant in Company L, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. During a German attack on that day, near Radden, France, he led and encouraged his men until everyone in his unit had been killed or wounded. Ignoring his own wounds, he continued to fight the enemy force alone in hand-to-hand combat until he was killed. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor on July 17, 1946. Sgt. Messerschmidt, aged 20 or 21 at his death, was buried in Christ Lutheran Church Cemetery, Barnesville, PA.

He displayed conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty. Braving machine gun, machine pistol, and rifle fire, he moved fearlessly and calmly from man to man along his 40-yard squad front, encouraging each to hold against the overwhelming assault of a fanatical foe surging up the hillside. Knocked to the ground by a burst from an enemy automatic weapon, he immediately jumped to his feet, and ignoring his grave wounds, fired his submachine gun at the enemy that was now upon them, killing 5 and wounding many

others before his ammunition was spent. Virtually surrounded by a frenzied foe and all of his squad now casualties, he elected to fight alone, using his empty submachine gun as a bludgeon against his assailants. Spotting one of the enemy about to kill a wounded comrade, he felled the German with a blow of his weapon. Seeing friendly reinforcements running up the hill, he continued furiously to wield his empty gun against the foe in a new attack, and it was thus that he made the supreme sacrifice. Sgt. Messerschmidt's sustained heroism in hand-to-hand combat with superior enemy forces was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.