

MEDAL OF HONOR: JAMES W. REESE

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 James W. Reese, who received the Medal of Honor on December 17, 1943.



Private Reese joined the Army from his birth city of Chester, Pennsylvania in November 1941, and by August 5, 1943 was serving as a private in the 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. On that day, at Mt. Vassillio, Sicily, Reese led his mortar squad in a defense against an enemy counterattack.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty in action involving actual conflict with the enemy, James Reese was awarded the Medal of Honor. When the enemy launched a counterattack which threatened the position of his company, Pvt. Reese, as the acting squad leader of a 60-mm. mortar squad, displayed superior leadership on his own initiative. He maneuvered his squad forward to a favorable position, from which, by skillfully directing the fire of his weapon, he caused many casualties in the enemy ranks, and aided materially in repulsing the counterattack. When the enemy fire became so severe as to make his position untenable, he ordered the other members of his squad to withdraw to a safer position, but declined to seek safety for himself. So as to bring more effective fire upon the enemy, Pvt. Reese, without assistance, moved his mortar to a new position and attacked an enemy machine gun nest. He had only three

rounds of ammunition but secured a direct hit with his last round, destroying the nest and killing the occupants. Ammunition being exhausted, he abandoned the mortar, seized a rifle, and continued to advance, moving into an exposed position overlooking the enemy. Despite a heavy concentration of machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire, the heaviest experienced by his unit throughout the entire Sicilian campaign, he remained at this position and continued to inflict casualties upon the enemy until he was killed. His bravery, coupled with his gallant and unswerving determination to close with the enemy, regardless of consequences and obstacles which he faced, are a priceless inspiration to our armed forces.

Reese, aged 23 at his death, was buried in Chester Rural Cemetery, Chester, PA.

After the Second World War, the Reese Barracks in Augsburg, Germany, were named in his honor. A United States Army Reserve Center in Upland, PA was also named in his honor.