

MEDAL OF HONOR: JAY ZEAMER, JR.

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 Jay Zeamer, Jr., who received the Medal of Honor on June 16, 1943.



Major Jay Zeamer Jr. was a pilot of the United States Army Air Forces in the South Pacific during World War II. He was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and grew up in Orange, New Jersey.

On 16 June 1943, Major Zeamer (then Captain) volunteered as pilot of a bomber on an important photographic mapping mission covering the defended area in the vicinity of Buka, Solomon Islands. While photographing the Buka airdrome, his crew observed about 20 enemy fighters on the field, many of them taking off. Despite the certainty of a dangerous attack by this strong force, Maj. Zeamer proceeded with his mapping run, even after the enemy attack began. In the ensuing engagement, Maj. Zeamer sustained gunshot wounds in both arms and legs, one leg being broken. Despite his injuries, he maneuvered the damaged plane so skillfully that his gunners were able to fight off the enemy during a running fight which lasted 40 minutes. The crew destroyed at least 5 hostile planes, of which Maj. Zeamer himself shot down one. Although weak from loss of blood, he refused medical aid until the enemy had broken combat. He then turned over the controls, but continued to exercise command despite lapses into unconsciousness, and directed the flight to a base 580 miles away. In this voluntary action, Maj. Zeamer, with superb skill, resolution, and courage, accomplished a mission of great value.

Zeamer was promoted to major on July 8, 1943, and lieutenant colonel in April 1944. He spent 15 months in recovery, regaining most of the use of his left leg, and returned to active duty at Mitchel Field, New York as a Tactical Field Air Inspector. On January 18, 1945, Zeamer retired from the USAAF on disability.

He returned to MIT and obtained a master's degree in aeronautical engineering in 1946. Zeamer then worked for a series of aerospace companies: Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford, Connecticut, followed by Hughes Aircraft in Los Angeles, California, and finally Raytheon in Bedford, Massachusetts.