

MEDAL OF HONOR: JOHN J. MCVEIGH

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 John J. McVeigh, who received the Medal of Honor on April 6th, 1945.



McVeigh joined the Army in his hometown of Philadelphia in September 1942, and by August 29, 1944 was serving as a Sergeant in Company H, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. During a German counterattack on that day, near Brest, France, he directed his squad's fire and, when his position was almost overrun, single-handedly charged the Germans with his only weapon, a trench knife. McVeigh was killed in the attack, and on April 6, 1945, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Shortly after dusk on 29 August 1944 near Brest, France, an enemy counterattack of platoon strength was launched against 1 platoon of Company G, 23d Infantry. Since the Company G platoon was not dug in and had just begun to assume defensive positions along a hedge, part of the line sagged momentarily under heavy fire from small arms and two flak guns, leaving a section of heavy machine guns holding a wide frontage without rifle protection. The enemy drive moved so swiftly that German riflemen were soon almost on top of one machine gun position. Sgt. McVeigh, heedless of a tremendous amount of small arms and flak fire directed toward him, stood up in full view of the enemy and directed the fire of his squad on the attacking Germans until his position was almost overrun. He then drew his trench knife, and single-handedly charged several of the enemy. In a savage hand-to-hand struggle, Sgt. McVeigh killed one German with the knife, his only weapon, and was advancing on three more of the enemy when he was shot down and killed with small arms fire at

pointblank range. Sgt. McVeigh's heroic act allowed the two remaining men in his squad to concentrate their machine gun fire on the attacking enemy and then turn their weapons on the three Germans in the road, killing all three. Fire from this machine gun and the other gun of the section was almost entirely responsible for stopping this enemy assault, and allowed the rifle platoon to which it was attached time to reorganize, assume positions on, and hold the high ground gained during the day.