

MEDAL OF HONOR: JOHN T. TOMINAC

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 Harry R. Harr, who received the Medal of Honor on March 28th, 1946.



Tominac joined the Army from Conemaugh, Pennsylvania in November 1941, and by September 12, 1944 was serving as a first lieutenant in Company I, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty on 12 September 1944, in an attack on Saulx de Vesoul, France, 1st Lt. Tominac was awarded the Medal of Honor. He charged alone over 50 yards of exposed terrain onto an enemy roadblock to dispatch a 3-man crew of German machine gunners with a single burst from his Thompson machine gun. After smashing the enemy outpost, he led one of his squads in the annihilation of a second hostile group defended by mortar, machine gun automatic pistol, rifle and grenade fire, killing about 30 of the enemy. Reaching the suburbs of the town, he advanced 50 yards ahead of his men to reconnoiter a third enemy position that commanded the road with a 77-mm. SP gun supported by infantry elements. The SP gun opened fire on his supporting tank, setting it afire with a direct hit. A fragment from the same shell painfully wounded 1st Lt. Tominac in the shoulder, knocking him to the ground. As the crew abandoned the M-4 tank, which was rolling downhill toward the enemy, 1st Lt. Tominac picked himself up and jumped onto the hull of the burning vehicle. Despite withering enemy machine gun, mortar, pistol, and

sniper fire, which was ricocheting off the hull and turret of the M-4, 1st Lt. Tominac climbed to the turret and gripped the 50-caliber anti-aircraft machine gun. Plainly silhouetted against the sky, painfully wounded, and with the tank burning beneath his feet, he directed bursts of machine gun fire on the roadblock, the SP gun, and the supporting German infantrymen, and forced the enemy to withdraw from his prepared position. Jumping off the tank before it exploded, 1st Lt. Tominac refused evacuation despite his painful wound. Calling upon a sergeant to extract the shell fragments from his shoulder with a pocketknife, he continued to direct the assault, led his squad in a hand grenade attack against a fortified position occupied by 32 of the enemy armed with machine guns, machine pistols, and rifles, and compelled them to surrender. His outstanding heroism and exemplary leadership resulted in the destruction of four successive enemy defensive positions, surrender of a vital sector of the city Saulx de Vesoul, and the death or capture of at least 60 of the enemy.

Tominac remained in the Army after World War II, reaching the rank of colonel and serving in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He died at age 76 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington County, Virginia. The Maple Street Bridge in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in his home county of Cambria County, was named the Colonel John Joseph Tominac Memorial Bridge in his honor.