

MEDAL OF HONOR: LESLIE H. SABO, 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 Leslie H. Sabo, who received the Medal of Honor posthumously on May 16, 2012.



Leslie Sabo, Jr. was a Specialist Fourth Class, U.S. Army, Company B, 3d Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, serving in the Vietnam War. He was born in 1948 in Kufstein, Austria. The Sabo family moved to the United States in 1950, settling in Ellwood City, PA.

On May 10, 1970, SP4 Sabo and his platoon were conducting a reconnaissance patrol when they were ambushed by a large enemy force. Without hesitation, SP4 Sabo charged an enemy position, killing several enemy soldiers. Immediately thereafter, he assaulted an enemy flanking force, successfully drawing their fire

away from friendly soldiers and ultimately forcing the enemy to retreat. In order to re-supply ammunition, he sprinted across an open field to a wounded comrade. As he began to reload, an enemy grenade landed nearby. SP4 Sabo picked it up, threw it, and shielded his comrade with his own body, thus absorbing the brunt of the blast and saving his comrade's life. Seriously wounded by the blast, SP4 Sabo nonetheless retained the initiative and then single-handedly charged an enemy bunker that had inflicted severe damage on the platoon, receiving several serious wounds from automatic weapons fire in the process. Now mortally injured, he crawled towards the enemy emplacement threw a grenade into the bunker. The resulting explosion silenced the enemy fire, but also ended Sabo's life. His indomitable courage and complete disregard for his own safety saved the lives of many of his platoon members. SP4 Sabo's extraordinary heroism and selflessness, above and beyond the call of duty, at the cost of his life, are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

Although he was posthumously promoted to the rank of sergeant, the circumstances of Sabo's death remained unclear to his family for several decades thereafter. Officially, the military reported Sabo had been killed by a sniper while guarding an ammunition cache somewhere in Vietnam. Sabo's company commander, Captain Jim Waybright, recommended him for the Medal of Honor, but the accounts of Sabo's actions and citation were lost for several decades. This changed in 1999 when Alton Mabb, another Vietnam War veteran of the 101st Airborne Division uncovered the documents while at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Mabb wrote U.S. Congresswoman Corrine Brown D.-FL, whom he asked to forward the recommendation. Brown lobbied the U.S. Department of Defense for Sabo to be recognized and, in 2006, Secretary of the Army Francis J. Harvey recommended that Sabo receive the Medal of Honor. Sabo posthumously received the Medal of Honor at the White House May 16, 2012, which was accepted by his widow. Sabo is interred at Holy Redeemer Cemetery in North Sewickley Township, Pennsylvania.