

MEDAL OF HONOR: ROBERT E. LAWS

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 Robert E. Laws, who received the Medal of Honor on September 10, 1945.



Robert Laws joined the Army from his birth city of Altoona, Pennsylvania in July 1942, and by January 12, 1945 was serving as a Staff Sergeant in Company G, 169th Infantry Regiment, 43rd Infantry Division. On that day, in Pangasinan, Luzon, the Philippines, he single-handedly destroyed a Japanese pillbox. Despite being wounded, he

then led an attack on enemy rifle positions and engaged a Japanese soldier in hand-to-hand combat. For these actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor eight months later, on September 10, 1945.

He led the assault squad when Company G attacked enemy hill positions. The enemy force, estimated to be a reinforced infantry company, was well supplied with machineguns, ammunition, grenades, and blocks of TNT and could be attacked only across a narrow ridge 70 yards long. At the end of this ridge, an enemy pillbox and rifle positions were set in rising ground. Covered by his squad, S/Sgt Laws traversed the hogback through vicious enemy fire until close to the pillbox, where he hurled grenades at the fortification. Enemy grenades wounded him, but he persisted in his assault until one of his missiles found its mark and knocked out the pillbox. With more grenades, passed to him by members of his squad who had joined him, he led the attack on the entrenched riflemen. In the advance up the hill, he suffered additional wounds in both arms and legs, about the body and in the head, as grenades and TNT charges exploded near him. Three Japs rushed him with fixed bayonets, and he emptied the magazine of his machine pistol at them, killing two. He closed in hand-to-hand combat with the third, seizing the Jap's rifle as he met the onslaught. The two fell to the ground and rolled some 50 or 60 feet down a bank. When the dust cleared, the Jap lay dead and the valiant American was climbing up the hill with a large gash across the head. He was given first aid and evacuated from the area while his squad completed the destruction of the enemy position. S/Sgt. Laws' heroic actions provided great inspiration to his comrades, and his courageous determination, in the face of formidable odds and while suffering from multiple wounds, enabled them to secure an important objective with minimum casualties.

He participated in the 1952 unveiling of the PRR's World War II memorial statue located in 30th Street Station, Philadelphia. He died at age 68 and was buried in Blair Memorial Park, Bellwood, Pennsylvania.