

HEADQUARTERS 41ST INFANTRY DIVISION
APO 41

S/aw (C/S)
17 March 1944

201-DeWitt, Leonard C. (enl)

Subject: Recommendation for Award of the Medal of Honor.

Thru : Commandant, OCS, APO 923.

To : Sergeant Leonard C. DeWitt, 20933467, OCS, APO 923.

The Commanding General directs that you be informed that he has recommended you to higher headquarters for award of the Medal of Honor. This recommendation was made in recognition of your conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty during the Salamaua Campaign on 28 July 1943. The Commanding General was pleased to make this recommendation and hopes the honor may be bestowed upon you.

For the Commanding General:

Signed
Kenneth S. Sweany,
Colonel, G.S.C.,
Chief of Staff.

Dated
21 March 1944
3:30 O'clock
HQ OCS

CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY

HEADQUARTERS
Company I
162d Infantry
APO 41

14 January 1944

C E R T I F I C A T E

I certify that on the following occasion Sergeant Leonard C. DeWitt, 20933467, Communications Sergeant, Company I, 162d Infantry, did perform in a manner far beyond his normal duties.

On 28 July 1943 this unit moved forward and began to organize a defensive position at 1810 hours. Before we were completely organized Jap artillery started landing shells in our position from point blank range. As soon as the artillery lifted the Japs opened up with machine guns from the front and both flanks, and their riflemen started attacking with fixed bayonets in an attempt to penetrate our perimeter. Sergeant DeWitt with utter disregard for his personal safety crawled from man to man all around the outer positions of our perimeter. He then moved men into the weak spots by personally leading them there. Observing that grenades and ammunition were running short in certain sectors, he revisited the positions and issued more grenades and ammunition wherever needed. By this time it was 2000 hours and almost impossible to see more than about five to ten yards. I personally witnessed Sergeant DeWitt's actions up to this point.

X On the left flank of our perimeter there was a sharp drop of about twelve feet just below one of our positions. The Japs concentrated on this point and succeeded in making a slight penetration to the left of this position and were attempting to widen it. Their activity was so great and so close that the man occupying this position lost his self-control and started firing out into space and all around himself, endangering our own men with his fire. Sergeant DeWitt covered Sergeant Hudson's advance up to this man, and after Sergeant Hudson and another man had overpowered the man and removed him, Sergeant DeWitt armed with one grenade moved into the man's hole where he found Sergeant Hudson's M1 Rifle with three shells in it. He threw his grenade and emptied the M1 at the Japs just below him. Then he picked up a BAR and emptied the clip at the Japs. There was no more .30 caliber ammunition there, so he picked up a tommy-gun left by the soldier assisting Sergeant Hudson in removing the man who had lost control of himself. This tommy-gun was also out of ammunition. The Japs threw a grenade which lit just on the back edge of Sergeant DeWitt's hole, and in trying to get cover from it Sergeant DeWitt fell forward out of the perimeter. His tommy-gun hit a Jap during the fall and knocked him back down the slope below DeWitt. The Jap then charged at DeWitt who being unarmed picked up his helmet and threw it at the Jap, hitting him in the face. Several soldiers heard the Jap scream. Sergeant DeWitt scrambled back up to his position and when reinforcements arrived personally placed five men and picked their fields of fire. The Japs then withdrew.

Sergeant DeWitt's quick thinking and initiative was outstanding and was very instrumental in turning a possible defeat into a successful action. In the capacity of Communications Sergeant it was not part of his duties to function in the outstanding manner that he did. Any failure to have carried out these actions would most certainly not have been censured by this officer.

I have personal knowledge of Sergeant DeWitt's actions after 2000 hours by talking to Sergeant DeWitt and men who were near him at different phases of this action. A personal reconnaissance the following morning showed evidence of at least three dead or wounded Japs being dragged away during the night at the spot where this action took place.

AP3140 [Signature]
~~CLASSIFIED BY THE REGULATORY BOARD~~

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(OVER)

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Sergeant DeWitt's example caused the morale and initiative of the men of this unit to become excellent. The Japs seemed to be in excellent morale and were aggressive even though failing in their mission.

Albert L. Colvert
ALBERT L. COLVERT,
Captain, Infantry,
Special Service Officer,
Formerly Cndg. Co. I.

20143

HEADQUARTERS
162nd Infantry
APO 41

H/o
9 March 1944

Z10.5

Subject: Recommendation for Award of Decoration.

To : The Commanding General, 41st Infantry Division, APO 41.

1. Under the provisions of AR 600-45, and USAFFE Regulation 10-50, 17 August 1943, I recommend that Sergeant LEONARD C. DeWITT, 20933467, Company I, 162nd Infantry, be awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty at Scout Track Ridge, Boise, New Guinea, 28 July 1943, as evidenced by his actions described below.

2. On 28 July 1943, Company I, 162nd Infantry, moving forward on Scout Track Ridge near Boise, New Guinea, encountered a large enemy force in a well organized perimeter. Not being able to proceed, the company dug in to hold the ground gained until reinforcements arrived. The defensive position prepared by Company I was approximately 250 yards distant from the enemy, on the top of a ridge. The ridge top was almost bare of cover with only a few trees. Before the position was entirely organized, at about 1800 hours the Japanese opened up on the position with artillery fire. This continued for approximately 15 minutes until just at dusk the fire was lifted to burst in the tree tops and an attack was launched, covered by machine gun fire. The attack was concentrated entirely on the front of the perimeter facing the enemy position. Since the company carried only one unit of fire per man, the quarters bearing the brunt of the attack was soon dangerously low of ammunition and grenades. Sergeant DeWitt, the communications sergeant, realized this precarious situation and voluntarily left his fox hole to carry ammunition and grenades from other positions. This act in itself was entirely beyond the call of duty since the entire perimeter was being swept with machine gun and mortar fire. Upon reaching the sector under the heaviest fire, he found that one man had become panicky and was firing blindly into the air. He directed that this man be removed, then checked the adjoining fox holes and found two men to be wounded. With the help of another soldier Sergeant DeWitt removed these two men to a place of safety and immediately returned to the weakened position to prevent a possible enemy break through. Upon his return he found that the enemy had massed in a gully about 5 yards to his front in an attempt to break into the perimeter at that point. Unarmed up until this time, he picked up a Browning Automatic Rifle which was left by one of the wounded men, and fired into the massed enemy who were attempting to swarm through the vacated positions. When the ammunition for the BAR was exhausted he picked up a Thompson Sub-machine Gun and stood fully exposed on the brink of the gully, firing this weapon until it was empty, then throwing all his remaining grenades. Out of ammunition, Sergeant DeWitt slipped over the edge of the gully hitting one

CONTINUED BY THE DECORATIONS BOARD

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Jap in the face with his empty tommy gun. This Jap then charged at Sergeant DeWitt, who turned and struck him in the face with his helmet knocking him down the slope. This action seemed to demoralize the enemy as they picked up their dead and wounded and withdrew.

Sergeant DeWitt displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this attack. His action in stopping the gap which had been left by the wounded men undoubtedly saved the company from much heavier casualties and possibly the loss of the position. He acted entirely beyond the call of duty with complete disregard for his personal safety throughout the engagement.

3. The terrain over which this engagement was fought has been generally described in the preceding paragraph. The main mission of the company was one of defense, to prevent the enemy from entering and taking the position. Thus, fighting was conducted from fox holes for the most part. Visibility of the defending force was limited. The attack came at dusk, and observation was impeded by underbrush which provided cover for the Japanese. In the later phases of the attack Company I resorted almost entirely to hand grenades to repel the Japs. Enemy observation of our position was somewhat better, since there was little cover in the defended perimeter. The morale of Company I's troops was high although some of the men were unnerved by the tenseness of the situation. The morale of the enemy seemed high as demonstrated by the determination of their attacks. Enemy troops appeared fresh and well equipped. The weather at this time was extremely hot and damp, though there was no rain and the ground was fairly dry.

4. Proposed citation:

Sergeant Leonard C. DeWitt (20933467) Infantry, United States Army. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty near Boise, New Guinea on 28 July 1943. When his company was attacked by a superior Japanese force and one sector of the defensive perimeter ran dangerously low of ammunition and grenades, Sergeant DeWitt voluntarily left his fox hole and carried ammunition to the heavily pressed flank across open terrain swept by enemy machine gun and mortar fire. Upon reaching the position bearing the brunt of the attack he found that a soldier had become panicky and was firing blindly into the air. He directed his removal and then upon checking two adjoining fox holes found the men to be wounded. After ordering their evacuation he hurried back to the position weakened by the removal of the three men and found the enemy was massing in an attempt to break through at this point. Picking up a BAR which had been left by one of the wounded men he fired at the enemy only five yards distant until the ammunition was exhausted. He then grasped a tommy gun and stood fully exposed on the edge of his fox hole emptying the gun into the enemy position. Throwing his remaining grenades he slipped down the slope toward the enemy, hitting a Jap with his empty tommy gun. In attempting to get back to his fox hole he was attacked by this Jap and beat him in the face with his helmet, knocking him back down the slope. This demoralized the enemy who picked up their dead and wounded and withdrew. The fearless acts of Sergeant DeWitt in exposing himself to enemy fire in order to save the position were beyond the call of duty. Had it not been for his action the Japanese would have been able to break through at one point of the perimeter causing heavy casualties and perhaps the loss of the position. Sergeant DeWitt's extraordinary heroism and coolness under fire are worthy of the highest recognition.

5. The undersigned was not an eyewitness to these acts, nor has he personal knowledge of Sergeant DeWitt's daring deeds.

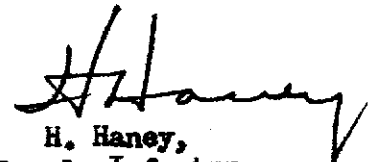
6. Attached are two affidavits and one certificate by eyewitnesses.

7. The status of Sergeant DeWitt during the period upon which this recommendation is based, was that of Communications Sergeant, Company I, 162nd Infantry.

8. Present status: Attending Officer's Candidate School, APO 923.

9. The services of Sergeant DeWitt have been honorable from 28 July 1943, to the present date.

10. Name, relationship and address of next of kin: Leonard D. DeWitt (Father), Box 967, Olympia, Washington.



H. Haney,
Colonel, Infantry,
Commanding.

3 Incls: 2 affidavits
1 certificate

A F F I D A V I T

On the date 28 July 1943, our unit, "Colvert Force," was situated in a perimeter on a ridge top on Scout Trail, 400 yards west of Roosevelt Ridge.

We were held up here by a large force of Japs, later proving to be two battalions. Our force being only 160 men, we were forced to dig in and hold until reinforcements could arrive. The enemy was in a well organized perimeter 250 yards to our front.

At 1730 hours the enemy brought artillery fire to bear on us, which was lifted 15 minutes later. The Japs then attacked under the cover of heavy and light machine guns and knee mortars. They pressed their heaviest attack on the quarter of our perimeter at the front; in consequence these men were soon dangerously low on ammunition and grenades.

Sergeant Leonard DeWitt, 20933467, picked up ammunition and grenades from the men in the rear of the perimeter and distributed it to those in front. As it was pitch dark and overcast, he was continuously in danger of being fired on by his own troops as well as the enemy.

Sergeant DeWitt moved among the men in the front positions and gave them much needed encouragement. This being their first heavy engagement with the enemy, our troops lacked confidence to a degree. The morale of the enemy was exceedingly high.

As the fight progressed, two of our men in one sector were wounded and one became panicky and lay in the bottom of his fox hole firing wildly in the air. Sergeant DeWitt aided First Sergeant Hudson in evacuating these men. During his absence the Japs regrouped and on his return he found them within five yards of the vacant positions and preparing to enter the perimeter. X

Sergeant DeWitt stood on the edge of the hill in the break in our perimeter and fired clip after clip into the enemy. When his ammunition was exhausted, he was forced to beat one Jap, who was trying to force his way through, with his helmet. This action disorganized the enemy to the point where they withdrew and did not attack the sector again that night.

In my estimation we would have sustained many casualties and lost much valuable ground to the enemy had it not been for the coolness of Sergeant DeWitt and the courage with which he acted. Most of this action was witnessed by me and the rest I learned from men who were nearby. X

Courage and resourcefulness of this caliber should be recognized, and in my estimation Sergeant DeWitt is deserving of a citation and decoration.

Laurance Parker
Laurance Parker,
Sergeant, Company I, 162d Inf.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 15 day of Nov. 1943.

B. A. BACH
B. A. BACH,
CAPT 162d INF.

Summary Court Martial.

FORWARDED BY THE REGISTRATION UNIT

31 NOV 43

Del #2