



# STAFF SGT. RUDOLPH B. DAVILA

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

## This Month in NCO History: May 28, 1944 — Courage on display in Artena, Italy

*By Pablo Villa*

**S**taff Sgt. Rudolph B. Davila is the only U.S. Army Soldier of Filipino descent who fought in the European Theater of World War II to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.

His award is a fitting remembrance as the Army this month celebrates the contributions of Asians and Pacific-Americans to the history of the country as part of Asian Pacific Heritage Month. Though the award may not have been as timely for Davila — he waited 56 years to receive the nation's highest honor, which was originally a Distinguished Service Cross — there was no hesitation from him when his company came under heavy attack May 28, 1944, during a firefight near Artena, Italy.

Davila was part of an offensive carried out by H Company, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, that broke through a German stronghold surrounding the Anzio beachhead. He was leading his men over a hill when they came upon several German machine-gun nests waiting to pick apart an approaching 130-man American rifle company. The Germans turned their guns on Davila's men, spraying the hillside with heavy fire.

While most of the platoon retreated, Davila stayed put, dropping into the grass and imploring his men to pass him a machine gun. With a hail of bullets whizzing by, Davila assembled the gun and fired back, eliminating one of the enemy positions. Davila then called for one of his men to man the gun while he moved forward. He crawled to another vantage point and directed his gunner's fire with hand and arm signals to silence another of the German machine-gun nests, forcing the enemy back 200 yards.

Despite being wounded in the leg during the firefight, Davila continued pressing forward, running to a burned tank and firing from its turret. After abandoning the tank, Davila traversed a 130-yard expanse and reached a German-occupied farmhouse. Using a rifle and hand grenades, Davila killed five Germans and neutralized two more machine-gun nests ultimately forcing the enemy to abandon its prepared positions.

After the battle, Davila received a battlefield commission to second lieutenant and was eventually promoted to first lieutenant. His time in World War II

ended in late 1944 when he was seriously wounded in the shoulder by a tank shell. A captain in his company told Davila he would be recommended for the Medal of Honor for his actions near Artena. But he received the Distinguished Service Cross instead, an honor he humbly lived with after returning home, marrying and teaching at a Los Angeles high school until his retirement in 1977.

In 1996, Congress reviewed the records of Asian-Americans who had earned the Distinguished Service Cross in World War II to see if they should have

been awarded the Medal of Honor. On June 21, 2000, President Bill Clinton bestowed Davila and 21 others with the nation's highest honor during a ceremony at the White House. Davila was one of seven of the recipients still living. His wife, Harriet Davila, who continuously petitioned the government for her husband to receive the Medal of Honor, had died six months earlier.

Davila died at age 85 on Jan. 26, 2002, in Vista, Calif. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. ■

— *Compiled by Pablo Villa*

## Medal of Honor citation

Davila, Rudolph B.

*Rank and organization:* Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company H, 7th Infantry.

*Place and date:* Artena, Italy, May 28, 1944

*Entered service at:* Los Angeles, California

*Born:* April 27, 1916, El Paso, Texas

### *Citation:*

Staff Sergeant Rudolph B. Davila distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action, on 28 May 1944, near Artena, Italy. During the offensive which broke through the German mountain strongholds surrounding the Anzio beachhead, Staff Sergeant Davila risked death to provide heavy weapons support for a beleaguered rifle company. Caught on an exposed hillside by heavy, grazing fire from a well-entrenched German force, his machine gunners were reluctant to risk putting their guns into action. Crawling fifty yards to the nearest machine gun, Staff Sergeant Davila set it up alone and opened fire on the enemy. In order to observe the effect of his fire, Sergeant Davila fired from

the kneeling position, ignoring the enemy fire that struck the tripod and passed between his legs. Ordering a gunner to take over, he crawled forward to a vantage point and directed the firefight with hand and arm signals until both hostile machine guns were silenced. Bringing his three remaining machine guns into action, he drove the enemy to a reserve position two hundred yards to the rear. When he received a painful wound in the leg, he dashed to a burned tank and, despite the crash of bullets on the hull, engaged a second enemy force from the tank's turret. Dismounting, he advanced 130 yards in short rushes, crawled 20 yards and charged into an enemy-held house to eliminate the defending force of five with a hand grenade and rifle fire. Climbing to the attic, he straddled a large shell hole in the wall and opened fire on the enemy. Although the walls of the house were crumbling, he continued to fire until he had destroyed two more machine guns. His intrepid actions brought desperately needed heavy weapons support to a hard-pressed rifle company and silenced four machine gunners, which forced the enemy to abandon their prepared positions. Staff Sergeant Davila's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.



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