



STAFF SGT. FREEMAN V. HORNER

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

This Month in NCO History - Nov. 16, 1944

Undaunted Infantryman Wins Würselen

By Pablo Villa

Joyce Horner was going through old paperwork at her home in Columbus, Georgia, shortly after her marriage to Freeman V. Horner when she came upon something surprising. It was documentation that showed her husband was a recipient of the nation's highest military honor. Shocked, she asked her husband why he had never disclosed that he was awarded the Medal of Honor for actions during World War II. His response was, "Nothin' to tell."

Far from the truth.

Freeman V. Horner was a staff sergeant with K Company, 119th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division, in November 1944. The "Old Hickory" division was fresh off a victory Oct. 16 at the Battle of Aachen in which it helped the 1st Infantry Division encircle and secure the heavily fortified German city in one of the largest urban

battles fought by U.S. forces in World War II. Aachen was the first city on German soil captured by the Allies. After a brief respite, the unit pushed northeast toward the Inde River.

On Nov. 16, K Company encountered resistance upon approach to the town of Würselen. Machine-gun fire began raining down on the group from houses on the edge of town. The Americans were pinned down in flat, open terrain 100 yards from their objective. As they took cover in the field, enemy artillery observers trained their fire on them and inflicted serious casualties.

Horner knew the unit would eventually be eliminated if it remained in the precarious position. That's when he pulled off a feat that — despite his recalcitrance decades later in Georgia — would be talked about for generations to come.

Horner secured his ammunition and grenades, then sprinted toward the homes as a hail of gunfire whizzed by him, according to his Medal of Honor citation. He reached what he thought was a safe vantage point halfway to the buildings and identified two positions from which enemy fire was originating. As he pondered his next step, fire from a third machine-gun nest opened up on him. Horner coolly wheeled and killed the two gunners with a single short burst from his rifle. He then resumed his run toward the homes as bullets kicked up dirt at his feet.

Whether through fear or strategic ploy, the Germans abandoned their guns as Horner reached the building. Horner was unscathed and could hear the enemy soldiers scramble into the cellar of the home. The intrepid infantryman burst into the building and hurled two grenades down the cellar stairs. Four men emerged from the lower floor with their hands up.

Horner single-handedly neutralized three enemy machine-gun positions, killed or captured seven German soldiers and cleared the path for his company's eventual successful assault on Würselen. For his actions, Horner

was awarded the Medal of Honor on Oct. 30, 1945.

After the war Horner, who was born June 7, 1922, in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, briefly separated from the Army but rejoined and earned a commission through Officer Candidate School. He reached the rank of major and served in the Korean War before retiring. He married Joyce Horner after the death of his first wife, Agnes, in 1982. He rarely spoke about his actions in Germany. Not even his longtime Columbus neighbor, Robert B. Nett, a retired colonel and fellow Medal of Honor recipient, was privy to tales of Horner's heroism. Nett told the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer in 2005 that the two "never talked shop."

Nonetheless, Horner's extraordinary courage was a living embodiment of the 119th Regiment's motto — "Undaunted" — and he remains one of the most celebrated Soldiers of the now-defunct 30th ID. Horner died Dec. 1, 2005, in Columbus at the age of 83 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. A section of U.S. Route 27 in Cataula, Georgia, as well as Georgia Route 219 in Columbus was named for him. ■



<https://www.armypress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

