



# STAFF SGT. STANLEY BENDER

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

## This Month in NCO History: Aug. 17, 1944 — Taking the knoll near La Londe, France

Compiled by Pablo Villa

**W**hen the 3rd Infantry Division reached the shores of France on Aug. 15, 1944, the Rock of the Marne had already seen several examples of gallantry from its Soldiers that were worthy of the nation's highest honor. It took only two days to witness another.

Staff Sgt. Stanley Bender stood tall as a barrage of German gunfire barreled toward him before helping his unit gain a crucial position near La Londe, France. Bender was part of E Company, 7th Infantry, 3rd Infantry Division. The unit made landfall in southern France after spending the previous 21 months engaged in battles throughout North Africa and Sicily as part of the 3rd ID's Operation Torch. The men of the 3rd ID would eventually be awarded 15 Medals of Honor for their actions in Italy. Bender would join their ranks when he leapt into action after one of the company's tanks was disabled.

The division was beginning its push north through France to close the gap on German forces who were scurrying east in a hasty retreat from Allied forces, which had landed two months earlier at Normandy.

Bender's unit encountered heavy German resistance near the town of La Londe. When a volley of machine-gun fire halted an American tank, the company was pinned down. Bender scrambled to the top of the disabled tank and scanned the horizon to find the source of gunfire. He stood bravely in full view of the enemy while a steady stream of bullets careened off the turret below him for more than two minutes, according to his Medal of Honor citation. He eventually saw muzzle flashes flaring from a knoll 200 yards away. From there, Bender leapt off the tank and into history.

According to the citation, Bender ordered two squads to cover him as he took a group of Soldiers through an irrigation ditch toward the enemy gunfire. For the first 50 yards of their advance, they were sprayed with intense fire, resulting in four Soldiers being wounded. Bender ended up alone ahead of the squad and stood his ground while the Germans hurled grenades into the ditch. Once the squad reached his position, Bender set out for the German stronghold. He wound his way to the rear of the enemy emplacement, then started marching toward it — alone. With no cover fire laid down for him, Bender

traversed 40 yards as the occasional German and friendly fire whizzed past him. He reached the first machine gun and eliminated it with a short burst.

That caught the attention of another two-man machine-gun crew, which turned the weapon around and trained it on him. But Bender was unfazed. He walked calmly through the hail of fire and nullified the threat before signaling his men to rush the remaining rifle pits. Bender headed back to his squad's position, killing another German rifleman along the way, and together they charged the remaining eight German soldiers in the machinegun nest. The attack galvanized the rest of the assault company, with Soldiers spring from their positions shouting. The company eventually overpowered an enemy roadblock, knocked out two anti-tank guns, killed 37 Germans and captured 26 others.

The attack also resulted in the capture of three bridges over the Maravenne River and command of key terrain in southern France. Bender's actions were in keeping with the "conspicuous gallantry and the intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty," worthy of the nation's highest honor. He was awarded the Medal of Honor on Feb. 1, 1945.

After his service, Bender had two bridges named in his honor on the West Virginia Turnpike, one in 1954 and the other in 1987. In addition to his Medal of Honor, Bender, who joined the Army in December 1939, was awarded the French Croix de Guerre, as well as the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star and seven battle stars. He died June 22, 1994, at age 84 in Oak Hill, W.Va. He was buried in High Lawn Memorial Park in Oak Hill. ■



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