

# This Month in NCO History: Jan. 11, 1945 — Into the Teeth of the Tiger

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

January 21, 2016



Despite the bitter cold, there was something serene about the waning winter storm system that left nearly three feet of snow on the ground a few weeks after Christmas in January 1945 northeast of Bastogne, Belgium.

The 6th Armored Division had been heavily engaged in the Siege of Bastogne as part of the storied Battle of the Bulge during World War II. When the offensive concluded Dec. 27, the "Super Sixth" began what would be a month-long process to drive the enemy back across the Our River into Germany. On Jan. 11, 1945, Staff Sgt. Archer T. Gammon was part of A Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, 6th Armored Division, as the platoon began its advance through an open field near Bastogne while light snow softly glided to the ground. The crunching of the Soldiers' boots in the deep snow provided a rhythmic cadence to the otherwise quiet winter day.

The calm was violently disrupted by the boom of a German Royal Tiger tank. The iron behemoth let loose a screaming flurry of 88mm shells on the Americans' left flank. With it came machine-gun fire supported by riflemen. A Company's progress was immediately halted as it scrambled to return fire.

Gammon was unfazed. He was near the front of the American advance when the engagement began. When he saw the German tank near the rear of his unit, Gammon immediately ran toward it — and into history as a recipient of the nation's highest military honor.

Gammon scrambled quickly through the deep snow, rushing forward then crossing the width of his unit's skirmish line to get within grenade range of the tank and the foot troops guarding it. The enemy took note of his movement as the automatic fire began humming toward his position. According to his Medal of Honor citation, Gammon was unperturbed, charging forward 30 yards and wiping out the machine-gun crew with four grenades before getting within 25 yards of the tank. With its prime cover fire eliminated, the tank and remaining riflemen began to withdraw, firing as they went. Gammon killed two more enemy soldiers, successfully putting "the ponderous machine on the defensive" as it "started to withdraw, backing a short distance, then firing, backing some more, and then stopping to blast out another round."

Before Gammon could make one last advance at the tank, one of its rounds struck him, killing him instantly. He was 26. The tank continued to withdraw, leaving open the path for Gammon's platoon to find safety in the woods.

Gammon was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor on Feb. 13, 1946, in part for his "intrepidity and extreme devotion to the task of driving the enemy back no matter what the odds."

Gammon was born Sept. 11, 1918, in Chatham, Virginia. He enlisted in the Army in nearby Roanoke in March 1942. After his death, he was buried in Mountain View Cemetery in Danville, Virginia. A Boulder Victory-class cargo ship built near the end of World War II was transferred to the Army and renamed the USAT Sgt. Archer T. Gammon. It served with the Army from 1946 to 1950. In 1950, the ship was acquired by the U.S. Navy and it was decommissioned in 1973.