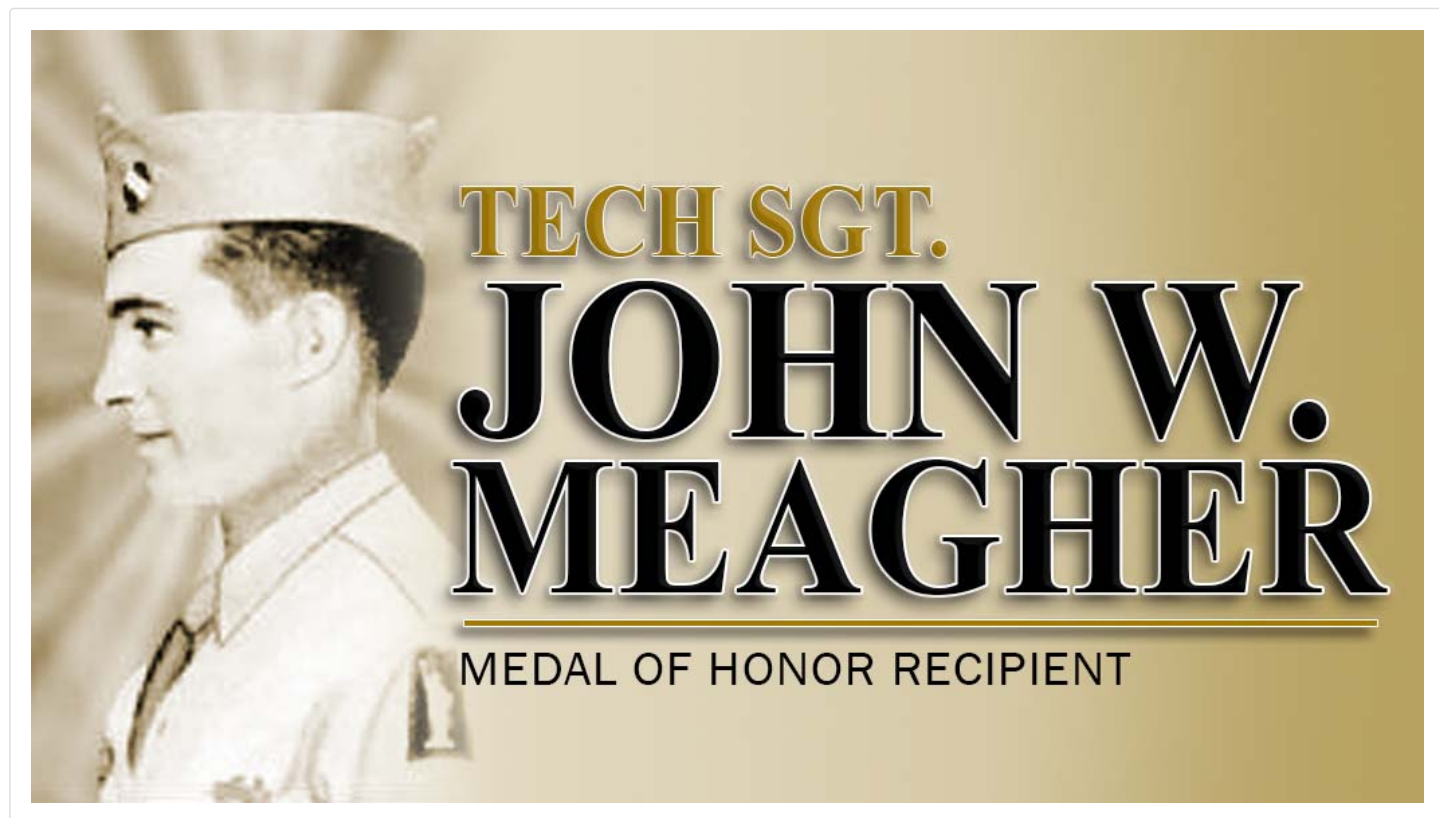


This Month in NCO History: June 19, 1945 — A One-Man Charge at Ozato, Okinawa

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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Technical Sgt. John William Meagher was atop a moving tank when he spied a Japanese soldier with a bomb clutched in his hands dashing toward the vehicle's tread. Meagher didn't hesitate. He barked the location of one last target to the tank's gunner before leaping off the iron behemoth to charge at the incoming threat — and into history as a recipient of the nation's highest military honor.

Meagher was part of E Company, 305th Infantry Regiment, 77th Infantry Division, on June 19, 1945, when it ran into Japanese resistance near Ozato, Okinawa (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%8Czato,_Okinawa). The Statue of Liberty Division had arrived in Okinawa in March to relieve the 96th Infantry Division. By June, it had moved to the southern end of the island near Ozato from its previous position in Shuri. Here, the 77th ID was charged with covering the right flank of the XXIV Corps to seal off cave positions the Japanese used as safe havens.

On that fateful June day, Meagher's unit was advancing against enemy resistance. According to his Medal of Honor citation, he climbed atop an assault tank to direct its fire against two fortified enemy targets. He did so despite "bullets splattering about him." Amid the hail of gunfire, Meagher noticed the lone Japanese soldier making a run at the tank. He jumped off the tank and ran toward the enemy with his bayonet extended in front of him.

While Meagher halted the attacker's charge, he also detonated the explosive device the attacker was carrying and was knocked unconscious by the blast. Meagher came to moments later. Finding his rifle destroyed and enemy fire still whizzing by him, he returned to his tank to grab a weapon. Meagher secured a machine gun and "began a furious one-man assault on the enemy," his citation states.

He fired from the hip as he moved through a barrage of bullets that ripped through his clothing. Meagher reached the nearest pillbox and killed six enemy soldiers. He sprinted to the next pillbox through more gunfire only to find his weapon out of ammunition. But Meagher was unfazed. According to his citation, "he grasped his empty gun by the barrel and in a violent onslaught killed the crew."

His single-handed effort silenced heavy enemy resistance and enabled his platoon to take its objective and continue the advance. For his actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor a year later on June 26, 1946.

Meagher was born Dec. 5, 1917, in Jersey City, New Jersey. On March 21, 1942, he was drafted into the Army for service in World War II.

The 77th ID was activated four days before his draft date. Meagher trained extensively with the division in the United States before heading for war in the Pacific. They fought in campaigns on Guam and Leyte before joining other forces in the Battle of Okinawa. Two days after Meagher's gallant one-man charge, the last remnants of Japanese resistance fell.

Meagher left the Army while still a technical sergeant. He died April 14, 1996, at age 78. Meagher was buried with full honors at Arlington National Cemetery.