

SIS Release B-861

(FUTURE RELEASE)

The Nation's highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor, has been awarded Technical Sergeant Charles H. Coolidge, Tennessee Infantryman, for the manner in which he faced four days of everything the Germans had last October in the rain-drenched hills near Belmont sur Buttant, France, the War Department announced today.

During that time the 24-year-old Doughboy tried a bluff that foiled in front of a company of German troops; duelled two tanks with his light carbine; advanced alone to blast a German attack with two cases of hand grenades, and with a handful of "green" troops frustrated a determined German attempt to turn the flank of his battalion.

A veteran of the 36th Infantry Division fighting in Italy and France, Sergeant Coolidge is a machinegun section leader. The Germans got their chance to throw everything they had at Sergeant Coolidge beginning last October 24, when his section was advancing to set up flank protection. Supporting the section was a platoon of riflemen. Most of these men were entering action for the first time. They suddenly came upon a force of advancing Germans whose strength was estimated at four times that of the Infantrymen.

"The situation was desperate," Staff Sergeant Clarence B. Hawkins, a leader of a squad of the riflemen later reported. "Sergeant Coolidge saw there was at least a company of Germans and something had to be done. He stepped in front of us and walked right at the Germans, yelling to them to surrender. You'd think he had an Army behind him. But the Germans hollered back for him to surrender.

"When it was apparent the bluff wouldn't work, he opened up with his carbine and hit two of the Germans. The enemy answered with a blast of automatic weapons fire. Sergeant Coolidge didn't take cover, although it was the heaviest fire I've ever been in. Instead, he moved around in the open and got the men dug in. They were new and the enemy was in greatly superior strength. The men wanted to withdraw.

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"But he kept them there and kept passing them ammunition. He took an M1 and fired all the ammunition he could get, and the enemy kept counterattacking all day. This kept up all the next day and the men were becoming exhausted from the incessant attacks and the constant artillery fire. On the third day, Sergeant Coolidge moved constantly among the foxholes and saw that every man had ammunition to fight off the attacks.

"Then, on the fourth day, two tanks burst suddenly from the wooded hills and led the advance against us. Sergeant Coolidge went after them, using his carbine to force them to button up and they couldn't see to overrun our positions. Then he took a bazooka and crawled out to the tanks. While they kept constant fire on him he tried to use the bazooka to destroy the tanks but for some reason the bazooka wouldn't fire. With the tanks and enemy riflemen firing on him, he withdrew through our lines and got two boxes of hand grenades.

"With these he again advanced to meet the enemy who were coming up through a gully under protection of the tanks. He threw all the hand grenades at the Germans in this gully and, realizing we had no antitank fire and were at the mercy of the Germans firing from behind tanks, he ordered a withdrawal. Later, when we retook this ground we found 20 dead Germans in the draw where he'd fought with hand grenades."

Sergeant Hawkins' home is R.F.D. 1, Hillsboro, Ohio.

"They'd have overrun our position in many of those attacks if it hadn't been for Sergeant Coolidge," Private Pete N. Bono, whose home is on Yellowstone Highway, Bannock, Idaho, reported. "Always during the height of the attacks he'd be out in the heaviest fire getting supplies to the men when their ammunition ran low."

Sergeant George Kent, of 11 Serine Street, LaGrange, Georgia, said he counted the hand grenades Sergeant Coolidge threw at the advancing Germans during the tank attack.

"There were 70," he said. "And when he decided a withdrawal was necessary he got out in front with a rifle and covered the withdrawal of each man.

Born in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, Sergeant Coolidge was graduated from the high school there and was employed as a book binder in Signal Mountain when he entered the Army in April, 1942.

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His mother, Mrs. Grace McCracken Coolidge, lives at 504 Carolina Street, Signal Mountain.

Presentation of the Medal of Honor will be made overseas where Sergeant Coolidge's unit is engaged in stamping out the final resistance of the Nazi.

Sergeant Coolidge was presented the Silver Star shortly before his division "hit the beach" in France for his daring in using a machinegun to break up a German attack on May 31, 1944, in Italy. The citation shows that on that date he led a machinegun section in a forced night march to cut off an enemy garrison. Strongly supported by self-propelled guns and automatic weapons, the Germans attacked in an effort to break out. At the height of the attack, Sergeant Coolidge moved a machinegun to an exposed position 25 yards from the enemy and opened fire into their advance.

With the Germans swarming the position he swung the gun on a free traverse to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy and break up the assault. The disorganized Germans were routed by counterattacking Infantrymen.

The citation which accompanies the award of the Medal of Honor:

"Technical Sergeant Charles H. Coolidge, Company M, 141st Infantry, leading a section of heavy machineguns supported by one platoon of Company K, took a position near Hill 623, east of Belmont sur Buttant, France, on October 24, 1944, with the mission of covering the right flank of the Third Battalion and supporting its action.

"Sergeant Coolidge went forward with a sergeant of Company K to reconnoiter positions for coordinating the fires of the light and heavy machinegun. They ran into an enemy force in the woods estimated to be an infantry company. Sergeant Coolidge, attempting to bluff the Germans by a show of assurance and boldness, called upon them to surrender, whereupon the enemy opened fire. With his carbine, Sergeant Coolidge wounded two of them.

"There being no officer present with the force, Sergeant Coolidge at once assumed command. Many of the men were replacements recently arrived; this was their first experience under fire. Sergeant Coolidge, unmindful of the enemy fire delivered at close range, walked along the position, calming and encouraging his men and directing their fire. The attack was thrown back.

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"Through October 25 and 26 the enemy launched repeated attacks against the position of this combat group but each was repulsed due to Sergeant Coolidge's able leadership. On October 27, German infantry, supported by two tanks, made a determined attack on the position. The area was swept by enemy small arms, machinegun and tank fire. Sergeant Coolidge armed himself with a bazooka and advanced to within 25 yards of the tanks. His bazooka failed to function and he threw it aside. Securing all the hand grenades he could carry, he crawled forward and inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing enemy.

"Finally it became apparent that the enemy in greatly superior force, supported by tanks, would overrun the position. Sergeant Coolidge, displaying great coolness and courage, directed and conducted an orderly withdrawal, being himself the last to leave the position.

"As a result of Sergeant Coolidge's heroic and superior leadership, the mission of this combat group was accomplished throughout four days of continuous fighting against numerically superior enemy troops in rain and cold amid dense woods."

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