

Curtis Shoup: The Life of a Man Who Hated War

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About this Article:

Written by Robert J. Watson on November 9, 2001, this article honors S/Sgt. Curtis Shoup, a native of Oswego, New York, who gave his life in Tillet, Belgium on January 7, 1945. A special thank you to the 87th Infantry Division Legacy Association for permission to use this article. (87thinfantrydivision.com)

I knew this man - Curtis Shoup - very well. We lived near one another and graduated together from Oswego, New York High School, our birthdays and ages were only three months apart.

Curtis was a quiet, unassuming person, his boyish looks reflecting his age. He was an excellent student and while he did not participate much in sports, he was strong and graded well in strength tests. Curtis Shoup's father was a Baptist minister and the son hoped some day to emulate his father.

After our graduation in 1940, our paths split for several years. So it must have been fate that brought us together again in August 1944 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. That month he was assigned to my unit, Company I, 346th Regiment.

We had many memories to share and warmly renewed our acquaintance. Although he hated war, Curtis proved to be a fine soldier. He was trained as a Browning Automatic Rifleman, carrying and firing the weapon both in training and in combat. His proficiency and dedication brought him promotions to staff sergeant and he became an assistant squad leader. Although war was not to his liking, he realized that someday he might have to kill or be killed.

On 7 January 1945 seven days before his 24th birthday, the temperature in Belgium dived to near zero. In fact for five days before 7 January, the temperature and visibility consistently stayed around zero. In this situation, we Americans were at a terrible disadvantage. That's because the Germans had selected their area of concentration



and did not need much additional observation. Day after day, they rained down tank and machine-gun fire from the east-end of the village steadily depleting our forces and keeping us pinned down.

Unable to dig in, the heat of our prone bodies melted the snow, penetrating our clothing and actually freezing us in place. Our weapons operated erratically, while German snipers picked off anybody who raised his head. Under these conditions, our advance was painfully slow, exacting an exorbitant cost in blood.

On the fourth day of being pinned down in the snow and bitter cold, Company I was achieving a small advance when it encountered withering fire from two German machine guns and some mortars. Curtis Shoup was able to spot one of the machine guns but because of the terrain, was unable to draw a bead on it with his BAR.

He tried to run to a more advantageous position but ran into a hail of machine-gun fire. Then, to the amazement of all of us, he stood up straight and fired from the hip at one machine gun. Hit again, he somehow managed to crawl toward the machine gun and drop a grenade, destroying the nest. Although mortally wounded, he was actually attempting to destroy the second machine gun when a sniper took his life.

Those who say it all will never forget this incredible, unselfish act. Inspired by his sacrifice, our company fought house to house under extremely heavy fire and finally

captured Tillet. Our five-day siege had started with ninety enlisted men and five officers. At the end, we had thirty-five enlisted men and one officer, myself.

Why does one person sacrifice his life to save others? That question has preyed on my mind for over half a century. We will never have answers and we certainly will never know how many fatalities would have been caused if Staff Sergeant Curtis Shoup had never risen up and sacrificed his life.

Other courageous Americans played key roles in overcoming the tenacious enemy in this battle. They included but were not limited to 1st Lt. Glen Doman, a fine officer from K Company, who won the Distinguished Service Cross of exceptional bravery in the battle. Lt. Bill O'Donnell, now a Monsignor of the Catholic Church, who jumped on a disabled German tank and directed fire at the enemy, winning the nation's third highest award, the Silver Star. Erasmus Pistone of the Third Battalion medical detachment, who was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for administering first aid under fire.

Curtis Shoup was the only member of the 87th Infantry Division to have received the United States' highest military award as American troops fought to lift the yoke of Nazi tyranny.

Curtis, I know that God has already blessed you.

**Curt Arata describes
his uncle,
Curtis Shoup:**

"A son of a Baptist minister, I am told he was just a flat out wonderful guy. Everyone I have met who knew him all say the same things, he was handsome, full of life, had an infectious laugh, and loved his family and friends. No one who knew him was surprised at his sacrifice, or at the value he placed on his fellow soldiers versus his own life."

Medals Honoring S.Sgt. Curtis Shoup



Curtis Shoup was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Military Medal of Great Britain, the Croix De Guerre with Palm of France, the Order of Leopold of Belgium, the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart and the Combat Infantry Badge.



**Medal of Honor S.Sgt. Curtis F. Shoup
Infantry, U.S. Army Tillet, Belgium
7 January 1945**



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

The President of the United States takes pride in
awarding the MEDAL of HONOR posthumously to

STAFF SERGEANT CURTIS F. SHOUP,
CO. I, 346th INFANTRY, UNITED STATES ARMY

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

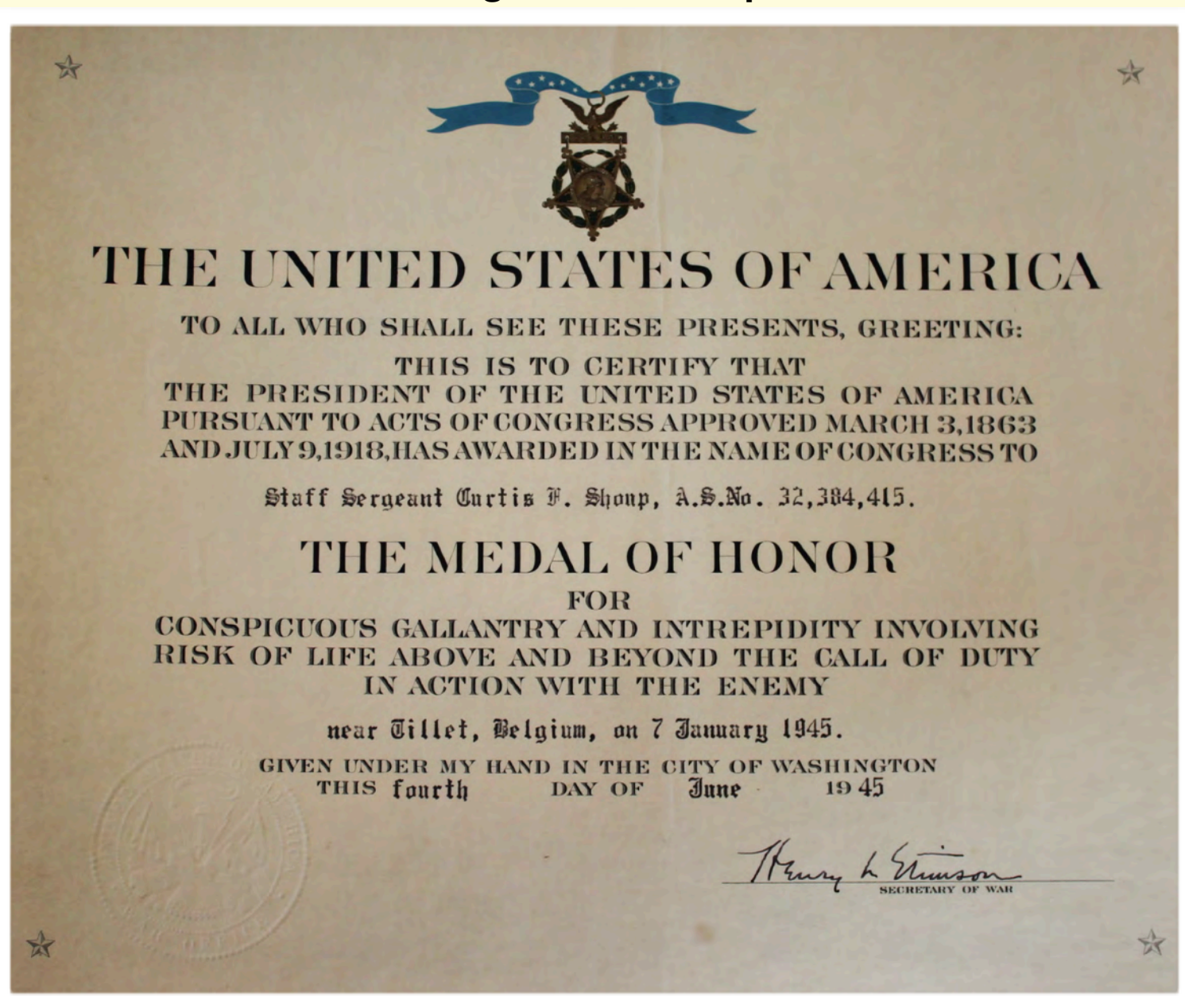
"Sergeant Shoup was an assistant squad leader with Company I, 346th Infantry, on 7 January 1945, near Tillet, Belgium, when his company attacked German troops on rising ground. Intense hostile machine gun fire pinned down and threatened to annihilate the American unit in an exposed position where frozen ground made it impossible to dig in for protection. Heavy mortar and artillery fire from enemy batteries was added to the storm of destruction falling on the Americans. Realizing that the machine gun must be silenced at all costs, Sergeant Shoup, armed with an automatic rifle, crawled to within seventy-five yards of the enemy emplacement. He found that his fire was ineffective from this position, and, completely disregarding his own safety, stood up and grimly strode ahead into the murderous stream of bullets, firing his low-held weapon as he went. He was hit several times and finally was knocked to the ground. But he struggled to his feet and staggered forward until close enough to hurl a grenade, wiping out the enemy machine gun nest with his dying action. By his heroism, fearless determination and supreme sacrifice, Sergeant Shoup eliminated a hostile weapon which threatened to destroy his company and turned a desperate situation into victory."

Harry Truman

Congressional Medal of Honor Citation

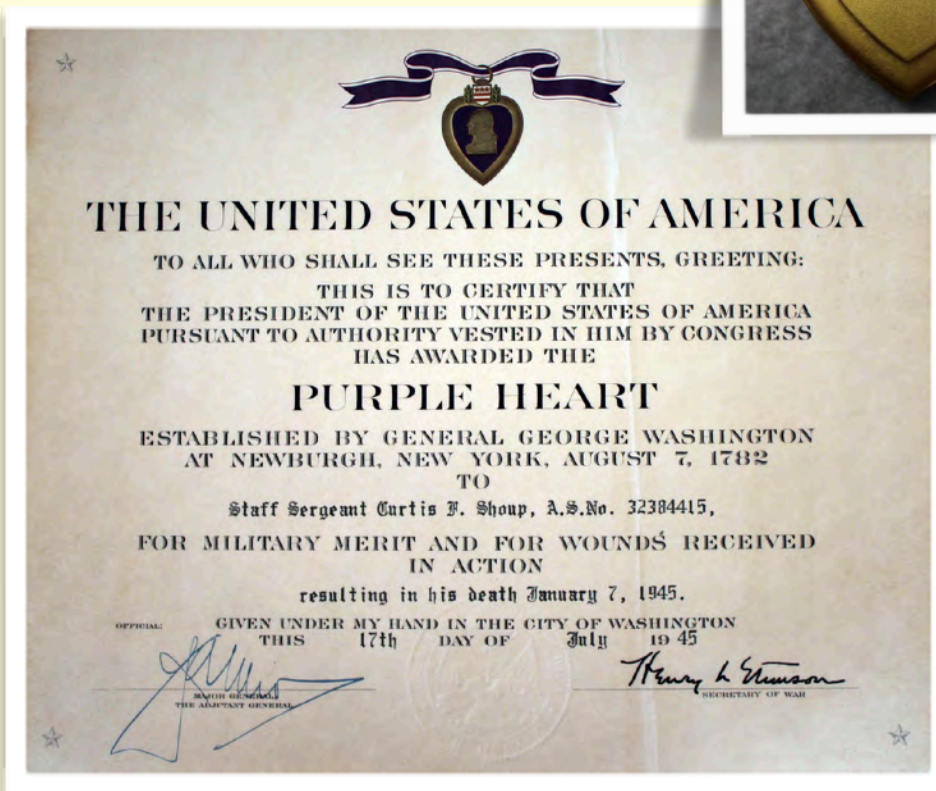
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S.Sgt Curtis Shoup





S.Sgt Curtis Shoup The Purple Heart



S.Sgt. Curtis Shoup The Order of Leopold of Belgium



S.Sgt Curtis Shoup The Croix De Guerre with Palm of France



**S.Sgt Curtis Shoup
Military Medal
awarded by
Great Britain**





C I T A T I O N

STAFF SERGEANT CURTIS F. SHOUP
UNITED STATES ARMY

MILITARY MEDAL

On 7th January, near Tillet, Belgium, Sergeant Shoup, armed with an automatic rifle, crawled forward to silence an enemy machine gun. Finding that he could not deliver effective fire from a concealed position, he boldly stood upright and advanced to full view of the enemy, firing the heavy gun from his hip. Hit by enemy fire several times and finally knocked down, he struggled to his feet and continued doggedly forward, destroying the gun with a hand grenade. His body was found later beside the enemy position.

British Embassy,

Washington, D.C.,

20th March, 1947.



S.Sgt Curtis Shoup