WAR DEPARTMENT
Bureau of Public Relations
PRESS BRANCH
Tel. RE 6700, Brs. 3425 and 4860

Ault - 416

SIS Release C-266

FUTURE RELEASE

Curiosity about his own skill as an artilleryman may have prompted Technician 4th Grade Arthur O. Beyer to turn foot-soldier and clear a ridge in Belgium of 26 Germans -- an action which has won the former Iowa and Minnesota mechanic the Medal of Honor.

Award of the Nation's highest honor for valor in battle to Sergeant Boyer was announced today by the War Department. The 36-year-old hero, whose skilled gunnery in combat later won him the Bronze Star Medal, is still in Europe and has been given the choice of receiving the Medal of Honor from his theater commander or of returning to the United States for White House ceremonies in Washington, where President Truman would present the award.

Gallantry which touched almost upon the foolhardy marked Sergeant Boyer's deliberate stalking of a string of enemy foxholes near Arloncourt, Belgium, last January 15. His one-man offensive accounted for eight Germans killed, 18 captured and two machineguns destroyed. The captured Krauts included members of two bazooka teams set to destroy American armor.

Only once as he cleared the ridge with carbine fire and grenades did the Medal of Honor winner leave his feet -- and that was to drop on one knee to steady his aim as he fired on the second of two enemy machinegun positions. He even chose to ignore bursting German mortar shells, and came through the whole encounter without a scratch.

Trained in Field Artillery, Sergeant Boyer handled the 76-mm gun aboard an M-18 tank destroyer of Company C, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion, a unit of the 6th Armored Division.

He first entered the Army on February 20, 1941, from the tiny hamlet of Ogema, in west central Minnesota. In November, 1941, he was transferred to the Enlisted Reserve Corps because of his age and re-entered the Army February 25, 1942. The sergeant's nearest relative is a sister, Mrs. Verna Zitnak, of St. Ansgar, Iowa, and he was born at Mitchell, Iowa.

Sergeant Beyer's company was part of a task force driving the Nazis from Belgium in the Battle of the Bulge. His unit, however, struck a snag on the left flank of the Arloncourt objective -- a wooded ridge 200 yards dead ahead, from which the Germans poured machinegun, bazooka and rifle fire at the tank destroyers.

Beyer, then a corporal, spotted one enemy machinegun position and opened fire. His 76-mm cannon silenced the gun and killed one of the crew.

- more -

Scooping up some hand grenades and clips for his carbine, Sergeant Beyer jumped off the tank destroyer and headed for the machinegun position, firing as he walked. Just as two surviving Germans surrendered, another machinegun 250 yards to the sergeant's left sought his range.

Bullets spat all around him as he advanced. But the Jorry gunner's aim was bad. Each time the German showed his head above the rim of his foxhole, Beyer blazed away with his carbine. He kept the German crew pinned down until he was within grenade range. He tossed one grenade into the hole, destroying the machine gun and killing one more German. Again, two surrendered.

Guns of the tank destroyer were covering the prisoners when Sergeant Beyer spotted several foxholes strung out along a wooded ridge for a quarter mile. All of the holes were occupied by German riflemen who continued to fire on the "one-man army."

Sergeant Beyer's carbine was hot in his hands and he pitched grenades with World Series skill as he cleaned out one foxhole after another. Six stubborn Krauts died, but 14 others surrendered to the man they couldn't kill as he cleared the ridge and enabled his company to proceed to its objective without further trouble.

"Just like him," was the comment of Lieutenant Colonel Clarence D. McCurry of 630 West Broadway, Maryville, Tennessee, commanding officer of the 603d Battalion, when he heard about Beyer's exploit. Then the officer added:

"The action was a worthy one, and contained such a huge proportion of personal danger and courage as to border on the foolhardy.

"A man whose personal courage, initiative, and contempt for bodily harm causes him to perform an act so superior to his fellows, and so much above and beyond the call of duty should, I believe, be honored by the highest recognition possible."

In awarding the sergeant the Medal of Honor, the War Department was in official agreement with Colonel Curry.

An eye-witness to Sergeant Beyer's heroics, his gun commander, Sergeant Royce W. Hall of 1911 South Quincy Street, Sedalia, Missouri, gave a keen account of the action. He said:

"Throughout the action, Beyer was exposed to rifle and machinegun fire from the foxholes he had not yet reduced. He threw five or six grenades altogether and fired three or more clips of carbine ammunition.

"As he came back to the destroyer, some mortar shells hit in his vicinity, undoubtedly because by this time he had been seen from a neighboring enemy position several hundred yards farther out. The next day seven Germans came out of this woods and surrendered."

It was Sergeant Hall who first wondered what "got into Beyer" as the TD gunner suddenly turned foot-soldier and did a job which any Infantryman would have been proud of. Hall added:

"When Beyer left the destroyer he said he was going out to see if he got all the men in the foxhole he had fired at with the 76-mm gun. When he turned down the line of foxholes, he was too far away for me to stop him. We never knew what he had in mind at all.

"He challenged each foxhole in turn, taking all prisoners who would come out and killing those who refused to come out with grenades. There were six foxholes in all, one of the farther ones containing the machinegun which he silenced with his carbine by firing on the Krauts to keep them down until he got close enough to throw a grenade into the hole."

Another witness who substantiated the story was the driver of the tank destroyer, Corporal Charles C. Wilkerson of 708 South Walnut Street, Centralia, Missouri.

The assistant driver, Private First Class George W. Groak of R.F.D. 4, Box 669-C, Jacksonville, Florida, said:

"Except for dropping on one knee to fire on the machinegun that opened up on him, all the action by Beyer was while he was erect and walking. The Germans even fired five mortar rounds at him and he kept walking."

There was no doubt about Sergeant Beyer's skill as a tank destroyer gunner on April 8, when he won the Bronze Star Medal.

During an enemy counterattack at Marolterode, Germany, his company came under the direct fire of two 88-mm assault guns and a company of German infantry. His battalion headquarters reported that "Sergeant Beyer's quick thinking and superior gunnery accounted for both guns and was a major factor in repulsing the attack."

The official citation reads:

"Corporal Arthur O. Beyer, Company C, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion, displayed conspicuous gallantry in action on 15 January 1945 near Arloncourt, Belgium.

"His platoon, in which he was a tank destroyer gunner, was held up by anti-tank, machinegun and rifle fire from enemy troops dug in along a ridge about 200 yards to the front. Noting a machinegun position in this defense line, he fired upon it with his 76-mm gun, killing one man and silencing the weapon.

"He dismounted from his vehicle and, under direct enemy observation, crossed open ground to capture the two remaining members of the crew.

"Another machinegun, about 250 yards to the left, continued to fire on him. Through withering fire, he advanced on the position. Throwing a grenade into the emplacement, he killed one crew member and again captured the two survivors.

"He was subjected to concentrated small arms fire but, with great bravery, he worked his way a quarter-mile along the ridge, attacking hostile soldiers in their foxholes with his carbine and grenades.

"When he had completed his self-imposed mission against powerful German forces, he had destroyed two machinegun positions, killed eight of the enemy and captured 18 prisoners, including two bazooka teams.

"Corporal Beyer's intrepid action and unflinching determination to close with and destroy the enemy eliminated the German defense line and enabled his task force to gain its objective."

RECOMMEND NATIONAL RELEASE