

Sgt. Johnson Uncertain About Taking Discharge With His Honor Medal

With the Fifth Army, Italy—The Medal of Honor awarded recently to Sergeant Oscar G. Johnson, Jr., 24, of Foster City, Michigan, entitles him to discharge from the army, for the asking.

But Johnson, who qualified for America's highest decoration on the Fifth Army front in Italy, was undecided about taking up civilian life when told he would receive the Medal. "I'm not sure," he said. He'd need more time, to think it over.

Without the medal, Johnson's chance for discharge was slim. He has an adjusted rating score of 59 points, accounted for by 31 months in the army, after October 8, 1942; 13 months overseas, beginning April 12, 1944; and 15 points for three battle stars appended to his European Theater Ribbon for service in campaigns in Italy. The Medal of Honor entitles him to five more points as well as being the means of him getting a direct discharge.

Johnson earned the medal in the operation that breached the Gothic Line at Il Giogo Pass, by killing 40 Germans atop Monticelli Ridge, knocking out three enemy machine guns and taking 24 prisoners. He was at that time acting squad leader of a 60-millimeter mortar squad in Company B of the 91st "Powder River" Division's 363rd Infantry Regiment.

He Describes Action

Johnson's outfit, Company B of the 363rd Infantry Regiment, 91st "Powder River" Division, had been badly cut up by the time it took Monticelli Ridge, key feature in Il Giogo Pass, after four days of bitter fighting. Johnson's 60-millimeter mortar platoon fired the rest of its mortar ammunition across the ridge, where it was known Germans were entrenched. Then the company dug in, preparing for inevitable counterattacks.

A private first class at that time, Johnson was acting squad leader of a mortar squad.

The first German counterattack came toward dusk that night. Johnson fired a Garand rifle but, because of brush, he was unable to see the effect of his fire. The Jerries threw hand grenades and fired rifle grenades, but the counterthrust was ineffective. Johnson's platoon, however, was obliged to pull back under the ridge for the night.

Johnson and a comrade went to the base of the hill as a German artillery concentration closed in on them and returned early next morning with rifle ammunition, a litter and drinking water.

The Jerries fired mortars all through the second day but didn't counterattack. It was during this day that 24 Germans crossed to Johnson and two buddies and surrendered to them.

Again going down for water and ammunition, this time with two comrades, Johnson encountered three Germans by a stone wall at the base of the hill. Johnson fired his pistol at the enemy group as they fled.

"I think I missed," Johnson said, "It was too dark to see."

Undergoing intense artillery fire, Johnson returned to a foxhole beneath the ridge, where he "sweated out" another night-long concentration of German mortar fire.

The area was drenched with mortar fire early next morning in preparation for continuous counterattacks which were to last until late in the afternoon. Of the three men in a foxhole, forward and to left of Johnson, protecting his company's left flank, two were

wounded seriously and the third moved in toward the center of the company. The left flank was left unguarded.

Two Officers Killed

Carrying a Garand rifle and a pistol, Johnson moved up and to the left to protect the flank. In a foxhole overlooking the ridge and commanding a long field of fire to a crest 200 yards beyond, he found a Tommy gun, an automatic rifle, two more Garand rifles and two magazines of automatic rifle ammunition. At least three German machine guns fired from the crest beyond, and four others, on high ground to Johnson's left, enjoyed flanking fire along the ridge. Two officers to right of Johnson, who stood up to fire on the machine guns to the front, were shot through the head and killed.

Johnson perched himself on the edge of his foxhole, exposed to enemy fire from the front and from the left flank, and remained there until the counterthrusts abated towards evening of the third day. Firing all the weapons he had, resting his elbow on his knees, he silenced all machine guns to the front and cut down 20 enemy infantrymen who charged a heavy machine gun position behind the ridge, to his right. Johnson had the advantage, due to concealment of brush around his foxhole, of seeing without being seen. As the charging men approached the gun position, they ran directly in front of Johnson and over level ground. He held an advantage also over other Germans who crept through the brush covering the slope leading down to the ridge behind which his company was lined up, to his right. These Germans tried to creep close enough to throw grenades over the ridge, but Johnson was able to shoot them up, from their flank. One German got within 15 yards of the ridge. Johnson fired on him but was unable to see the effect of his shots, because of the brush. However, the German didn't reappear, and it is assumed he was put out of action.

A mortar shell landed directly in a foxhole near Johnson and killed all three occupants.

Johnson meantime gave water and first aid treatment to the two wounded men in the foxhole near him.

He fired the Garand rifles most of the time but, although he feared the Germans would think he had a machine gun and concentrate mortar fire against his position, he fired his automatic rifle part of the time. He completely exhausted the three clips of ammunition he had for the Tommy gun.

Mortar Fire Heavy

In the middle of the afternoon, a medic appeared to his right and Johnson brought him over to treat the two wounded men in the foxhole. Between 2 and 3 p. m., he had a litter team from his company take one of the wounded

down the hill. Johnson later borrowed another litter from C Company, 500 yards away, down the hill, and rounded up three comrades in his own company to form the team that evacuated the other wounded man in the foxhole next to Johnson's.

The counterattacks subsided late in the afternoon, but heavy mortar fire was put down to the rear of B Company for some time afterward. The Germans evidently pulled out early that night.

The 361st Infantry Regiment, a sister regiment of the 363rd, moved up the next morning to take the high ground to B Company's left. Of the scattered German dead in the area, Johnson was officially credited with killing 40.

Sergeant Oscar G. Johnson, Jr., 24, of Foster City, Michigan, expressed regret recently that he wasn't with his buddies in the final Fifth Army offensive in Italy. He was absent because he had previously been called off the line to receive the Medal of Honor.

He was with his buddies throughout the bitter winter campaign so near, and yet so far, from Bologna. It was only a few weeks after he left them that their perseverance bore fruit and the men swept on past Bologna, fanned out in the rich Po Plain and helped bring about the unconditional surrender of all German forces in Italy.

Johnson is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar G. Johnson, Sr., of Foster City.

Mrs. William Green, Former Escanaban, Dies In Chicago

Mrs. William Green, the former Luella Carrow of Escanaba, died in Chicago Tuesday after a long illness. She was 71 years old.

Mrs. Green lived in Escanaba for many years. Her husband was a conductor on the Chicago and North Western railway.

She is survived by three daughters and two sons, Mrs. Edna G. Lukes and Mrs. May Newman, Chicago; Mrs. Emily Hunter, Glenview, Ill.; Charles S. Green, U. S. Navy; and Capt. George L. Green, U. S. Army.

Funeral services will be held in Chicago this afternoon. The body will be cremated, and the ashes brought to Escanaba for interment at Lakeview cemetery.

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