

February X, 2016

Mr. Patrick Murphy
Acting Secretary of the United States Army
The United States Army
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Murphy:

We write to request your personal review of the case to award James Megellas, a 98-year-old World War II Veteran, the Medal of Honor for acts of valor demonstrated as a first lieutenant in the 82nd Airborne Division during the Battle of the Bulge. We believe additional review is warranted based on errors in Army records and injustice in refusing to upgrade his Silver Star to the Medal of Honor.

On January 28, 1945, Megellas led his 27-man platoon in a surprise, devastating attack on a much larger advancing enemy force. The attack killed over 100 enemy troops; and 180 Nazi SS troops were captured. The victorious attack resulted in the seizure of Herresbach, Belgium, the last town before the Siegfried line – without the loss of a single American life.

Unfortunately, Megellas' Silver Star citation omitted the most significant individual act of valor by 1st Lt. Megellas that night – he singlehandedly destroyed an attacking German Mark V Tank and its crew, acting alone and armed only with his Thompson submachine gun and two gammon grenades. Furthermore, the citation omits that he alone killed 17 enemy soldiers in the initial firefight, before arriving in the town and killing 8.

Col. Edward J. Sims, 1st Lt. Megellas' superior officer who recommended Megellas for the Medal of Honor 71 years ago, discovered the citation's mistakes at a 504th platoon reunion in 1999. He immediately set about correcting the record, by preparing sworn eyewitness statements, contacting members of Congress, and requesting the Army's reconsideration of Megellas for the Medal of Honor.

The Army declined the upgrade in 2003, without having interviewed Megellas, Sims, or the eyewitnesses whose sworn statements had been prepared. The Army stated that because Sims' original paperwork could not be reviewed, having been destroyed in the 1973 Army records fire, the board could not make the determination that the proper award had not already been given. Further, the Army stated that although Megellas did take out the German tank, that fact alone would not have changed the decision.

We note that according to Army records during the Battle of the Bulge, the Army granted the Distinguished Service Cross to soldiers who destroyed tanks with a bazooka, and to some who took out machine gun nests. Megellas has been called the equivalent of five Sherman tanks, for himself charging the German Mark V Panther tank armed only with his Thomson submachine gun and two gammon grenades.

Col. Sims continued his efforts until his passing in 2013, and the Army has declined subsequent requests for review by members of Congress.

Bipartisan Congressional support for Megellas continues to strengthen, with legislation in both chambers that would authorize the award of the Congressional Medal of Honor to James Megellas, sponsored by Sens. Baldwin, Cornyn and Johnson, and Rep. Petri, should the Army grant this request.

The American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) strongly contends that Megellas deserves the Medal of Honor. Despite significant representation in the Armed Forces, only one Greek American, Chris Carr, received the Medal of Honor for service in World War II.

At this juncture, only your intervention as Acting Secretary of the Army can rectify this injustice against James Megellas, Edward Sims, and the 50th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne. The American people deserve to honor this hero, age 98, while he is still living.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of James Megellas' case for the Medal of Honor.

Sincerely,

GUS M. BILIRAKIS
Co-Chair, Congressional
Caucus on Hellenic Issues

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Co-Chair, Congressional
Caucus on Hellenic Issues

PETE SESSIONS
Chairman, House
Committee on Rules
