BRONZE STAR MEDALS FOR WWII COMBAT BADGES

BY: VERNON R. BROOK

On June 18, 1978, the Associated Press carried a news item with a San Antonio, Texas date line, announcing that a Mr. James H. Osborne had received a Bronze Star Medal for bravery in combat. But this statement was followed by a clarification that Mr. Osborne had not been in combat since he fought in Italy and North Africa 35 years ago. [1]

My interest in the announcement was more than cursory because another veteran, Mr. Ricardo Sanchez of El Paso, Texas, whom I had helped obtain his WWII medals was sent a Bronze Star and a Combat Infantry Badge in 1972. The Authorization for Issuance of Awards for Mr. Sanchez indicated the Bronze Star was awarded, "Based upon the award of the Combat Infantry Badge." [2] Therefore, when I read about Mr. Osborne's acquisition of a Bronze Star Medal based upon his receiving the Combat Medical Badge in WWII I decided to pursue the matter further.

Through correspondence with Mr. Osborne [3] it was learned that an issue of the Retired Army Bulletin carried the following announcement:

"World War II recipients of the Combat Infantry Badge or the Combat Medical Badge are entitled to the Bronze Star Medal according to a new Army policy.

Military retirees who qualify for the award should apply to the Awards Branch, Reserve Components Personnel and Administration Center, St. Louis, Mo." [4]

When Mr. Osborne read the above announcement, he inquired if he qualified and about two months later he received a copy of an Army order awarding him the Bronze Star. Since the order did not list any details, Mr. Osborne is not exactly sure what deed earned him the medal.

Like Mr. Osborne, Mr. Sanchez is not sure why he was awarded the Bronze Star. However, his combat service included participation in battles on New Guinea and Leyte where he was wounded and received the Purple Heart.

In an attempt to find out why Bronze Star Medals were issued to holders of WWII Combat Badges, I wrote the Awards Branch of the Army requesting the number of the policy that authorized the issuance of such medals. Their reply was a form letter indicating they were unable to comply with my request due to the July 12, 1973, fire at the Center. [5]

Determined to exhaust all resources of information, I then wrote to my congressman, explained the run around I had gotten and requested his help. His subsequent letter proved to clear up the matter which is explained in the following quote:

"The issuance of the Bronze Star Medal based on a World War II award of the Combat Infantryman Badge/Combat Medical Badge is not a new policy. Since the Bronze Star Medal did not come into existence until early in 1944, it was decided at that time to allow an individual who had met certain front-line requirements to receive this award retroactively. Inasmuch as the Combat Infantry Badge and Combat Medical Badge indicated that an individual had met..."
these front-line requirements, a determination was made in 1947 to authorize the Bronze Star Medal to recipients of these badges. For your information I am enclosing a copy of a memorandum dated 18 April 1947 initiated by the War Department regarding the aforementioned award of the Bronze Star Medal. The rationale contained in this memorandum is valid and will hopefully explain the logic behind the 1947 decision to award all Combat Infantry Badge /Combat Medical Badge recipients the Bronze Star Medal."

MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL JACOB L. DEVERS, COMMANDING GENERAL, ARMY GROUND FORCES

SUBJECT: Bronze Star Medal

1. Compilation of awards made through 28 February 1947 show that 559,471 Bronze Star Medals, 1,248,358 Air Medals, more than 800,000 Army Commendation Ribbons, and 129,972 Distinguished Flying Crosses had been awarded for meritorious service and/or heroism, between 7 December 1941 and 2 March 1946. 240,000 Bronze Star Medals were awarded to the Infantry and 33,000 to the Air Forces. 120,000 of the Bronze Star Medals awarded to the Infantry were for heroism and will probably be replaced by the Battle Cross; therefore, only 120,000 Bronze Star Medals were awarded to the Infantry for meritorious service in ground operations.

2. Tab A indicates graphically a comparison of the frequency of award of the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star Medal, and Air Medal during World War II. The frequency of awards is as follows: One Distinguished Flying Cross per .92 Air Corps casualties; one Air Medal per .095 Air Corps casualties; one Bronze Star Medal per 1.4 Ground Arms casualties; one Bronze Star Medal per 2.8 Infantry casualties. This includes all Bronze Star Medals, both for heroism and for meritorious service. One Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service was awarded to the Infantry for each 5.6 Infantry casualties. The frequency of award of the Air Medal is therefore 58.9 times that of the Bronze Star Medal awarded to the Infantry for meritorious service; and the frequency of award of the Bronze Star Medal to all branches was twice the frequency of award to the Infantry.

3. General Marshall (Tab B) desired that the Bronze Star Medal be awarded to fighting members of the ground forces just as liberally as the Air Medal to flying personnel of the Air Forces. The Infantry, while constituting only one-fourth of the Army during the war, sustained 75 percent of the losses. At the request of General Stilwell, General Marshall on 10 February 1945 dispatched a personal radio to each theater commander stating "some ground force commanders have been too conservative in the number of decorations awarded, especially insofar as the Bronze Star Medal is concerned. The Infantry is suffering the highest percentage of casualties, and this fact should be considered in the number of awards presented." In spite of this radio, awards to Infantry were still too conservative and the disparity in awards to fighting ground men compared to those awarded flying and rear echelon personnel is marked. It is believed that this disparity should be corrected.

4. At first the Combat Infantryman Badge was awarded only for "exemplary conduct in action against the armed enemy", and required an individual citation in General Orders. Late in 1944, the require-
ment was changed to authorize its award for "satisfactory performance of service in action against the enemy", but still required an individual citation in General Orders based on recommendation of the unit commander. In March 1945 the Medical Badge was authorized for "satisfactory performance of duty under actual combat conditions", which required an individual citation in General Orders based on the recommendation of the unit commander. All of these awards based on recommendation of the unit commanders were therefore published in General Orders. After 2 September 1945 the rules were relaxed and The Adjutant General now issues Combat Infantryman Badges and Medical Badges on application to all members of Infantry regiments or Infantry battalions who participated in combat. These issues do not carry a citation in General Orders. As a result, the individual who was recommended by his unit commander and cited in General Orders has received nothing distinctive for his meritorious service in ground combat. Many individuals who would not have been recommended by their commanders are now being issued Combat Infantryman Badges and Medical Badges by The Adjutant General. Under the provisions of AR 600-55 (Tab C) which was not rescinded until after the war, individuals were cited for "exceptionally meritorious conduct (in action)". Samples of citations are Tab D.

5. It is the opinion of Major General Bull of the War Department Decorations Board, Brigadier General Dahlquist formerly Commanding General, 36th Infantry Division, Colonel J.C. Fry of Career Management Branch, Colonel J.H. Phillips of Public Relations Division, and myself that citations under the provisions of AR 600-55 and citations in General Orders for the Combat Infantryman Badge or Medical Badge are deserving of the Bronze Star Medal for "meritorious service in connection with military operations." Other decorations have been and are still being awarded on the basis of citations or commendations (see Tab E). About 500,000 individuals were awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge and Medical Badge by General Orders during the war and possibly another 100,000 were cited under the provisions of AR 600-55 for meritorious conduct in combat, including members of all ground arms and services. These individuals are not eligible for the Army Commendation Ribbon, but their services were just as important. We now have over a million Bronze Star Medals on hand and there would be no additional cost to the government for medals under this proposal. Of the 600,000 eligible, approximately 200,000 would apply for conversions of their citations to Bronze Star Medals.

6. I would appreciate very much your comment on the following proposal, which we feel will remove in part the existing discrimination against the fighting soldier compared to flying personnel and rear echelon men in the matter of decorations: "Any individual who, between 7 December 1941 and 2 September 1945, was cited in General Orders for meritorious conduct in action or for exemplary conduct in action against the armed enemy may make application for a Bronze Star Medal on the basis of such citation. A citation in General Orders for the Combat Infantryman Badge or Medical Badge awarded during the period of actual hostilities is considered as a citation for meritorious conduct in action. These citations in General Orders were not automatic, but were based upon recommendations of unit commanders thoroughly familiar with the services of the individuals cited, and after a careful evaluation of their work. Awards of the Combat Infantryman and Medical Badges made subsequent to 2 September 1945 are automatic, are issued upon application, and are considered as based solely upon routine satisfactory performance of service in ground combat as determined from records of service (see AR 600-70)."

W.S. PAUL

The above quoted memorandum indicates there was concern that com-