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Senate urges Medal of Honor for World War II hero

Salem, OR – The Oregon Senate unanimously approved House Joint Memorial 17 on Thursday, a measure urging the Pentagon to give Leonard DeWitt the Medal of Honor for his actions in World War II.

“Colonel DeWitt demonstrated the bravery and sacrifice that defines his generation and the spirit of our nation’s military,” said Senator Brian Boquist (R-Dallas). “More than seventy years ago his Medal of Honor recommendation got lost in the shuffle of military bureaucracy. It’s time he was given the honor he is due.”

Leonard Dewitt served in the 41st Infantry “Sunset” Division of the Army National Guard. At great risk to himself, he defended a ridge in New Guinea against massing Japanese soldiers, single-handedly attacking Japanese troopers before they could sweep his fellow soldiers off the ridge. DeWitt used his weapon to keep the enemy at bay, and when he ran out of ammunition used his helmet as a hand-to-hand weapon.

DeWitt was nominated for the Medal of Honor for his “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty.” For paperwork reasons, the nomination never made it off the desk of General Douglas MacArthur. DeWitt has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the United States Army’s second-highest honor.

“Colonel DeWitt belongs in the pantheon of Oregon recipients of the Medal of Honor,” said Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day). “This is a citizen-soldier who conducted himself in the finest tradition of Oregon’s Army National Guard.”

“Men like this don’t come along every day,” said Senator Alan Olsen (R-Canby). “Colonel DeWitt is a hero, and should be recognized with our nation’s highest honor.”

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