

# Overlooked Valor

## The Heroic Sacrifice of Pfc. Lew Y. June

On a cold winter day in January 1945, Pfc. Lew Y. June and the rest of Company C 410<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division dropped down from the trucks that had transported them from Niederbron, France about thirty kilometers southeast to the village of Schirrhoffen.

Icy pellets of sleet bounced off the helmets of the troops as they made their way to the southeast of Schirrhoffen into a dense grove of trees. Once deep in the woods they dug in and waited for orders. Finally the order came to move out. The company advanced even deeper into the forest and stopped just short of a wide firebreak which had been cut through the woods. According to Tony Hillerman, a soldier in Company C, as they looked across the open ground of the firebreak, they could see the fresh dirt piled near the newly dug German defenses. Again, Pfc. June and the rest of Company C waited for orders. Finally at 1700, the order came to attack. Company C sprinted from cover and headed for the German lines. Despite the heavy fire and numerous casualties the company reached their objective, the intersection of a narrow road with the rail line and the main highway leading into Sessenheim.

The men of Company C didn't know it at the time, but they were up against one of the best German units on the Western Front, the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Mountain Division. The Germans, surprised by the attack, pulled back. The Americans hurriedly set up their defenses in anticipation of a German counterattack.

Pfc. June and the rest of his squad were positioned on an embankment protecting a machine gun crew. The men of Company C had barely gotten settled in their new positions when the SS troops launched a vicious counterattack. Despite the withering fire from the American troops, the SS troops got close enough to lob grenades into

the American positions. Pfc. Frank Romano of Alton, Illinois, a member of the same squad as Pfc. June, was firing a BAR at the advancing enemy when he heard someone behind him scream, "Grenade!" Romano turned just in time to see Pfc. June dive on the grenade and smother the blast with his body preventing the death and injury to other members of the squad. Romano had little time to think about what had happened as the Americans were forced to retreat in the face of the ferocious German assault. Pfc. June's body was not recovered. It was January 18, 1945.

The days following Pfc. June's death were marked by continuous movement and combat by the men of Company C. There was little time for the soldiers to stop and take stock of what they had witnessed.

Young Private First Class June was reported missing in action and dropped from the company roster January 29, 1945.

In March 1946, American troops, searching for the remains of missing soldiers, found the grave of Pfc. June not far from where he had fallen in combat. He had been buried by the Germans in a grave marked by a cross and a helmet. The body was recovered and moved to the U. S. Cemetery at St. Avold, France.

Following the end of the war, the family of Pfc. June requested his body be returned to the United States. Pfc. Lew Y. June was laid to rest at Rock Island National Cemetery February 2, 1949.

Pfc. June had been assigned to Company C on December 5 as a replacement. He had joined the Army July 17, 1943 in Chicago, Illinois. At that time June's family lived in at 118 Washington Street in Morris, Illinois. His father, Lew C. Hong and brother, Lew Yee Pon, would later move to 507 South Cicero Avenue in Chicago.

Due to the confusion and chaos of war, the heroic action of Pfc. Lew Y. June was never officially recognized. But his fellow combat infantrymen never forgot the sacrifice of this brave young man. And now they are seeking to honor his memory. The veteran members of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division WWII Association are seeking to make contact with the family of Lew Y. June for the purpose of honoring

one of their own and to recognize the sacrifice of the June family to the cause of freedom. Any person with information about Lew Y. June or his family, please contact the 103d Infantry Division Association at [info@103didww2assn.org](mailto:info@103didww2assn.org)