

CENTRAL CATHOLIC HONORS MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

A memorial honoring William J. Bordelon, Jr., the first native born San Antonian to receive the Medal of Honor for his bravery in World War II, was dedicated during ceremonies at Central Catholic High School on November 3.

Major General James J. McMonagle, USMC (Ret.), Central Catholic Class of 1949, provided featured remarks. He retired from active duty with the Marines in 1988 after 35 years of active commissioned service.

SSgt. Bordelon, a Central Catholic graduate from the Class of 1938, was killed in action in the battle of Tarawa on November 20, 1943, at the age of 22.

The Medal of Honor citation reads:

For valorous and gallant conduct above and beyond the call of duty as a member of an Assault Engineer Platoon of the First Battalion, Eighteenth Marines, tactically attached to the Second Marines, Second Marine Division, against the Japanese-held Atoll of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands on November 20, 1943.

Landing in the assault waves under withering enemy fire which killed all but four of the men in his tractor, Staff Sergeant Bordelon hurriedly made demolition charges and personally put two pill boxes out of action. Hit by enemy machine-gun fire just as a charge exploded in his hand while assaulting a third position, he courageously remained in action and, although out of demolition, provided himself with a rifle and furnished fire coverage for a group of men scaling the seawall.

Disregarding his own serious condition, he unhesitatingly went to the aid of one of his demolition men, wounded and calling for help in the water, rescuing this man and another who had been hit by enemy fire while attempting to make the rescue. Still refusing first aid for himself, he again made up demolition charges and single-handedly assaulted a fourth Japanese machine-gun position but was instantly killed when caught in a final burst of fire from the enemy.

Staff Sergeant Bordelon's great personal valor during a critical phase of securing the limited beachhead was a contributing factor in the ultimate occupation of the island and his heroic determination reflects the highest credit upon the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

Signed by: Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States

Originally buried on Tarawa, his body was moved to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. In November, 1995, some 52 years after his death, William Bordelon's body was brought back to San Antonio. Prior to being re-interred in the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, he became only the fifth person to lie in state at the Alamo, the Shrine of Texas Liberty.

Bordelon was the oldest of five children. At Central Catholic, he served as Battalion Major of the JROTC Cadet Battalion. In addition to the Medal of Honor, Bordelon was also awarded the Purple Heart, Presidential Unit Citation, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the World War II Victory Medal.

In addition to SSgt. Bordelon, the memorial dedication honored two other Central Catholic graduates -- Gene Seng, Jr. (Class of 1939) and Charles Montague (Class of 1940) -- who also lost their lives during the Battle of Tarawa on November 20, 1943.

The memorial which included the Medal of Honor is located in the Central Catholic lobby.

For more information:

www.cchs-satx.org/History/Heroes/Bordelon/Bordelonhonors.htm

www.marinemedals.com/bordelon.htm