

## SO TRY NOT TO GET HURT

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If every soldier or sailor was to receive a Purple Heart for wounds, accidents, or deliberate damage to oneself the medal makers never could have made enough of them to satisfy that criteria. That's because it seemed no one knew what the criteria was then or is even today. A missing finger was not as damaging as a shattered foot but both wound recipients were out of action at least temporarily. Which particular finger was missing could be a factor...an infantryman's loss of trigger finger could be devastating. Purple Hearts were awarded in the winter months for frozen noses, fingers, toes, and those that suffered those "wounds" were as incapacitated as a person whose leg had disappeared during an artillery burst.

It's not that we had the time or inclination to sit around discussing this "problem," but there was often consternation when the "Heart" appeared on the field jacket of a laughing, walking, smoking, swearing G. I. headed away from the action. "Who the hell does he know," was the question. It just never occurred to observers that under that uniform might be emptiness where parts were missing, or massive areas of bloody bandages. Some witnesses winced and we knew what they were thinking. Of course no one would stop the guy and ask questions.

When you saw Medics kneeling and busy on each side of a body you swallowed hard, uttered a little prayer that he was not hit bad, he was no one you knew, and that the fact the body was silent did not mean it was over for him. But it could be just as hard on your psyche if the body was screaming or thrashing in agony. Your first reaction was to keep moving away from the scene, at least out of earshot. You knew there was damn little a Medic could do there on the ground...a shot of morphine, sulfa powder in the wound, a compression bandage and the Medic hollering for a jeep. It was not your business to offer assistance, hell; you did not want to be there if he died.

What if suddenly your solemn duty is to drag, carry, assist a wounded buddy to anywhere you could get help. Quite often the artillery barrage is over when soldiers realize they are bleeding; pain does not always immediately enter the picture. Or you might hear your friend say, "Take a look at the back of my neck, it feels funny. You had both ducked under a log when the first shell exploded in the trees...you cautiously look and your first reaction is an automatic deep breath... he is in big trouble and you know it. Now what? You are the one panicked, not your buddy, but you have to make like it is just a scratch until medical attention is located.

Regardless of whom makes the decision, when a Purple Heart is awarded there has been at least some discussion as whether or not it was deserved and measured up to what is deemed fair to that person and others that might be affected by the decision. I never "earned" one even though I figured the bruises, cuts, scratches, shrapnel nicks, gasoline burns, might have added up to at least one. That Purple Heart badge indicates to most that the wearer has been in combat for some time and I was. More important is the fact that the medal provided five points toward going home. I had earned other points for time in service, time in combat, etc, and was within a handful to head back to the USA instead of doing "occupation" time in Germany. But no complaint, I was alive, healed and whole. And even when I had sufficient points I decided to take my "honorable" in Germany. Another year there was a wonderful experience. One day I'll tell you about it.