

South Dakota Medal of Honor Recipients

Arlo L. Olson

Rank and organization:

Captain, U.S. Army, 15th Infantry Division.

Place and date:

Crossing of the Volturno River, Italy
October 27, 1943

Entered service at:

Toronto, South Dakota

Born:

Greenville, Iowa

Memorial Dedication:

June 20, 1999 in Toronto, South Dakota

Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On October 13, 1943, when the drive across the Volturno River began, Capt. Olson and his company spearheaded the advance of the regiment through 30 miles of mountainous enemy territory in 13 days. Placing himself at the head of his men, Capt. Olson waded into the chest-deep water of the raging Volturno River and despite pointblank machine-gun fire aimed directly at him made his way to the opposite bank and threw two hand grenades into the gun position, killing the crew. When an enemy machine gun 150 yards distant opened fire on his company, Capt. Olson advanced upon the position in a slow, deliberate walk. Although five German soldiers threw hand grenades at him from a range of five yards, Capt. Olson dispatched them all, picked up a machine pistol and continued toward the enemy. Advancing to within 15 yards of the position he shot it out with the foe, killing nine and seizing the post. Throughout the next 13 days Capt. Olson led combat patrols, acted as company No. 1 scout and maintained unbroken contact with the enemy. On October 27, 1943, Capt. Olson conducted a platoon attack on a strongpoint, crawling to within 25 yards of the enemy and then charging the position. Despite continuous machinegun fire which barely missed him, Capt. Olson made his way to the gun and killed the crew with his pistol. When the men saw their leader make this desperate attack they followed him and overran the position. Continuing the advance, Capt. Olson led his company to the next objective at the summit of Monte San Nicola. Although the company to his right was forced to take cover from the furious automatic and small arms fire, which was directed upon him and his men with equal intensity, Capt. Olson waved his company into a skirmish line and despite the fire of a machine gun which singled him out as its sole target led the assault which drove the enemy away. While making a reconnaissance for defensive positions, Capt. Olson was fatally wounded. Ignoring his severe pain, this intrepid officer completed his reconnaissance, supervised the location of his men in the best defense positions, refused medical aid until all of his men had been cared for, and died as he was being carried down the mountain.

