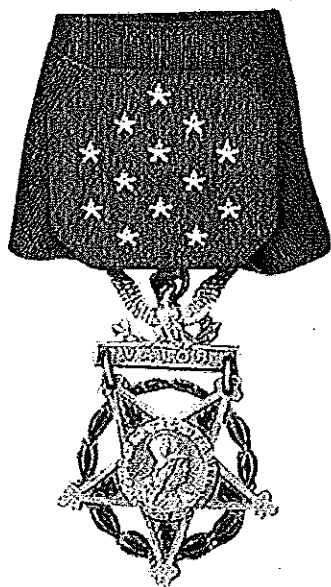


The Ultimate FO: Lieutenant John Fox

Medal of Honor Winner



Fifty-two years after he gave his life calling in fires to cover his unit's withdrawal, First Lieutenant John R. Fox received the Medal of Honor. In a ceremony at the White House 13 January, the President awarded Medals of Honor to seven African-Americans, all but one posthumously, for heroic actions during World War II—the only blacks to receive the nation's highest honor during that war. Among them was First Lieutenant John R. Fox from Cincinnati, Ohio, who made the ultimate sacrifice for his fellow soldiers while serving as a forward observer (FO).

The Citation. "The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress on March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of The Congress the Medal of Honor to First Lieutenant John R. Fox for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

"First Lieutenant John R. Fox distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism at the risk of his own life on 26 December 1944 in the Serchio River Valley in the vicinity of Sommocolonia,

Italy. Lieutenant Fox was a member of Cannon Company, 366th Infantry, 92d Infantry Division, acting as a forward observer while attached to the 598th Field Artillery Battalion.

"Christmas Day in the Serchio Valley was spent in positions occupied for some weeks. During Christmas night, there was a gradual influx of enemy soldiers in civilian clothes, and by early morning, the town was largely in enemy hands.

"An organized attack by uniformed German formations was launched around 0400 hours on 26 December 1944. Reports were received that the area was being heavily shelled by everything the Germans had, and although most of the US infantry forces withdrew from the town, Lieutenant Fox and members of his observer party remained behind on the second floor of a house, directing defensive fires.

"Lieutenant Fox reported at 0800 hours that the Germans were in the streets and attacking in strength. He called for artillery fire increasingly closer to his own position. He told his battalion commander, 'That was just where I wanted it. Bring it in 60 yards!' His commander protested the bombardment would be too close. Lieutenant Fox gave his adjustment, requesting the barrage be fired. The distance was cut in half.

"The Germans continued to press forward in large numbers, surrounding the position. Lieutenant Fox again called for artillery fire with the commander protesting again, stating, 'Fox, that will be on you!' The last communication from Lieutenant Fox was, 'Fire It! There's more of them than there are of us. Give them hell!'

"The bodies of Lieutenant Fox and his party were found when his position was taken. This action by Lieutenant Fox, at the cost of his own life, inflicted heavy casualties, causing the deaths of approximately 100 German soldiers, thereby delaying the advance of the



enemy until infantry and artillery units could be reorganized to meet the attack.

"Lieutenant Fox's extraordinarily valorous actions exemplify the highest traditions of the military service."

The Medal. The Medal of Honor was created during the Civil War as the first permanent individual medal for "gallantry in action." Early in the Civil War, General-in-Chief of the Army Winfield Scott killed the idea of such a medal because he thought it smacked of European affectations. However the Navy persevered, and through Public Resolution 82, the Navy Medal of Valor was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in December 1861. The medal was "to be bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen and Marines as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry and other seamanlike qualities during the present insurrection."

In July of 1862, a similar resolution was signed into law for the Army, providing for a Medal of Honor "to such noncommissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other soldierlike qualities during the present insurrection."

The Congress made the Medal of Honor a permanent decoration for all serving in the military in 1863.

During World War I, General John J. Pershing became concerned that the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military medal, was being awarded too frequently and losing its distinction. He established stricter criteria for the medal's award. The medal was to go to one "who distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty" with an act "so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades." To recognize significant gallantry not qualifying for the stricter criteria, the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) was created as the nation's second highest military award.

Of the 2,299 Medals of Honor awarded to Army personnel since the medal's inception, 52 were awarded to African-Americans, but only one in World War I (posthumously in 1991) and none for World War II. Of the 1.2 million black Americans who served in all branches of the military during World War II, none of the 433 Medals of Honor were awarded to blacks.

In 1993, the Secretary of the Army launched a full-scale probe, commissioning a study to determine if World War II African-American soldiers had been recommended for Medals of Honor and their awards had been rejected as an act of racial discrimination. The study found that in both the Civil War and Spanish-American War, blacks had

received Medals of Honor roughly in proportion to the number of blacks to whites in military service during those wars. However, during World War II, there seemed to be a general understanding that the DSC was the highest award for gallantry a black man could be worthy of.

The study examined the war records of all African-Americans recommended for the Medal of Honor or receiving the DSC. On 23 September, 1996, Congress approved Medals of Honor for seven black World War II servicemen, including Lieutenant Fox. Congress righted a half-century old wrong.

John Fox, The Man. John R. Fox was born 18 May 1915 in Cincinnati. He met his wife Arlene, a native of Abington, Massachusetts, at Wilberforce University, an all-black school in Ohio. When he graduated in 1941, he went into the Army immediately as a lieutenant; his daughter, Sandra, was born before he left for World War II. Killed in action on 26 December 1944 at the age of 26, John Fox was buried at Colebrook Cemetery in Whitman, Massachusetts.

Friends of the family worked for years to get Fox recognized for his heroic actions. Their efforts culminated in 1982 at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where Arlene Fox and her daughter accepted the DSC on Lieutenant Fox's behalf.

Mrs. Fox, 77 years old, now of Houston, Texas, also accepted the Medal

of Honor on behalf of her husband at the White House in January. Her description of her soldier husband: "He wanted to make the Army his life, regardless of the hardships....He always said he would never ask his men to do anything that he would not do himself....He wanted to make a difference."

In addition to the Medal of Honor, First Lieutenant John R. Fox earned the Bronze Star (posthumously), Purple Heart (posthumously), American Defense Service Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal (posthumously) and Combat Infantryman Badge.

On a cold day in December far across the ocean from family and friends, John Fox and his small observer party volunteered to stay behind and call in artillery to protect his withdrawing unit. In the face of a Nazi advance, he called in artillery closer and closer to his position, ensuring his significantly outnumbered unit had time to regroup. Finally, above and beyond the call of duty, he called in artillery on his own position.

Later, when US forces took the town of Sommoclonia, they found his riddled body among those of more than 100 enemy soldiers. He had put the lives of the men in the unit he was supporting ahead of his own life—the ultimate FO.

Editor

Salute Battery Names Howitzer After a Medal of Honor Winner

In a ceremony 28 February, the 2d Battalion, 2d Field Artillery of the 30th Field Artillery Regiment at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, named one of its Salute Battery howitzers after Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers, a World War II Medal of Honor winner from Tecumseh, Oklahoma. Rivers was awarded the medal posthumously by the President of the United States 13 January along with six other African-American World War II heroes denied the medal due to their color. Rivers was a member of A Company, 761st Tank Battalion in France on 16 to 19 November when he distinguished himself. Wounded with his leg slashed to the bone and repeatedly refusing morphine or evacuation, Sergeant



Rivers took command of a second tank when his was destroyed and fought with his company into the town of Guebling. When the company was stopped by enemy fire, the commander ordered the company to withdraw to cover. Sergeant

Rivers radioed, "I see 'em. We'll fight 'em!" and opened fire on enemy tanks along with another tank from A Company, enabling his company to withdraw. Rivers died when his tank was hit during the battle.