

# Matt Louis Urban

## Most decorated soldier in WW II

Matt Urban was born August 25, 1919 Matthew Louis Urbanowicz in Buffalo, New York to Stanley and Helen Urbanowicz, Polish immigrants. Urban majored in history and government with a minor in community recreation at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and graduated on June 14, 1941 with a Bachelor of Arts degree using the name Matty L. Urbanowitz. While at Cornell University, he was a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and the track and boxing teams.

Beginning at Fort Bragg, NC, Urban served as a platoon leader. Urban first went into combat when he made the beach landing under fire with another soldier on a raft during the invasion of North Africa (Operation Torch) of the North Africa Campaign on November 8, 1942. Along with a Purple Heart, one of the first medals he received was a Silver Star. While serving with the Second Battalion, 60th Infantry, he was wounded seven times. A member of his unit, Sgt. Earl G. Evans, wrote: The major, only a lieutenant at the time, was wounded in Maknassy, Tunisia and refused to be evacuated. He followed up this refusal by taking out a combat patrol. At another time in Tunisia, our battalion successfully halted a German counterattack, and it was through the major's efforts that we succeeded. As our outfit was falling back, the major held his ground and grabbed the closest German. He killed him with a trench knife, took the German's machine pistol, and fired at the onrushing enemy. The Germans counterattacked and Urban was wounded by grenade shrapnel.

After Africa, he was with his unit six days after landing at Normandy, when the company attacked German positions near Renouf, France. They were hit by heavy enemy small arms and tank fire. Urban found a bazooka and persuaded an ammo carrier to accompany him through the hedgerows to a point near the tanks. Exposing himself to the enemy, he knocked out both tanks, and the company moved forward and routed the enemy. Later that day, while advancing near Orglandes, Urban was struck in the leg by direct fire from a 37mm tank-gun. Wounded twice, he was evacuated to England for treatment.



US Army portrait of Urban as a young officer

While recovering, he learned that his unit, which had taken severe losses in the hedgerows of France, was lacking for experienced combat officers. He left the hospital and, still limping, hitchhiked his way back to his unit near St. Lo, France. Operation Cobra (July 25-31, 1944) was about to commence. Urban arrived at 2nd Battalion HQ to find that the company was checked by strong enemy opposition. He located an intact tank, but without a tank commander or gunner, it was not moving. Slowed by his leg wound, he ran through enemy fire

and mounted the tank, taking over its machine gun in the turret. He ordered the tank to advance and fired on the Germans. His actions energized the battalion who resumed the offense and destroyed the enemy position. On 2 August, Urban was wounded in the chest by shell fragments that narrowly missed his heart. He again refused to be evacuated to a hospital. On August 6, Major Max L. Wolf, the Second Battalion Commander, was killed in action near Cherbourg, France, and Urban, only 24 years old, assumed command of the battalion. Urban was wounded again on 15 August, but remained with his unit. On October 2 he was

promoted to major. He was later promoted to battalion executive officer and battalion commander of the 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division ("Old Reliables").

Beginning in October 1945, he was a staff writer and later an editor for Liberty Magazine's ("Liberty", 1924-1950) Veterans' View Bulletin until October 1947 (he was medically retired from the U.S. Army in February 1946). During this time he was promoted to lieutenant colonel (October 2, 1945) and changed his legal name from Matty Urbanowitz to Matt Urban.

Lt. Col. Matt Urban with President Jimmy Carter



In early 1979, a Michigan Disabled American Veterans (DAV) regional service representative who had come to know Urban personally over a long period of time, sent an official Medal of Honor recommendation inquiry to U.S. Army Headquarters. The misplaced MOH recommendation for Urban was found and revealed that Major Max L. Wolf, Urban's battalion commander in France, had initiated a Medal of Honor recommendation for Urban just prior to Major Wolf being killed in action in France,

in July 1944. In 1980, by the direction of the President, the Department of the Army awarded Matt Urban the Medal of Honor, in the name of the Congress. On July 18, 1980, he was presented the Bronze Star Medal (second oak leaf cluster), the Legion of Merit, and the Purple Heart (sixth oak leaf cluster) by the U.S. Army and the Croix de guerre with silver-gilt star by a representative from France during a special ceremony at the Pentagon. On July 19, President Jimmy Carter presented to Matt Urban the Medal of Honor in front of several hundreds of guests which included fellow 60th Infantry veterans who witnessed Urban's actions in combat.

After the war, Urban moved to Michigan where he served as recreation director for Port Huron for seven years, then director of the Monroe Community Center for 16 years. His last job was director of the civic and recreation department of Holland, Michigan. He retired in 1989. His death on March 20, 1995 was a result of complications from a collapsed lung brought on by one of his seven war wounds.

Lt. Col. Urban received a total of 29 awards and decorations, including the Silver Star (1 OLC), Bronze Star (2 OLC) with V Device, Purple Heart (6 OLC), NYS Conspicuous Cross with 4 Silver and 1 Gold Clusters, culminating in the Congressional Medal of Honor presented in 1980.

Urban died on March 4, 1995, in Holland, Michigan. The cause of death was a collapsed lung, reportedly due to his war injuries. He is buried in Plot: Section 7a, Grave 40 at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, with the statement, "Lt. Col. Matt Urban - World War II infantry officer who earned the distinction as the most decorated soldier in WW II".



For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty: Lieutenant Colonel (then Captain) Matt Urban, 112-22-2414, United States Army, distinguished himself by a series of bold, heroic actions, exemplified by singularly outstanding combat leadership, personal bravery, and tenacious devotion to duty, during the period 14 June to 3 September 1944 while assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division. On 14 June, Captain Urban's company, attacking at Renouf, France, encountered heavy enemy small arms and tank fire. The enemy tanks were unmercifully raking his unit's positions and inflicting heavy casualties. Captain Urban, realizing that his company was in imminent danger of being decimated, armed himself with a bazooka. He worked his way with an ammo carrier through hedgerows, under a continuing barrage of fire, to a point near the tanks. He brazenly exposed himself to the enemy fire and, firing the bazooka, destroyed both tanks. Responding to Captain Urban's action, his company moved forward and routed the enemy. Later that same day, still in the attack near Orglandes, Captain Urban was wounded in the leg by direct fire from a 37mm tank-gun. He refused evacuation and continued to lead his company until they moved into defensive positions for the night. At 0500 hours the next day, Captain Urban, though badly wounded, directed his company in another attack. One hour later he was again wounded. Suffering from two wounds, one serious, he was evacuated to England.

In mid-July, while recovering from his wounds, he learned of his unit's severe losses in the hedgerows of Normandy. Realizing his unit's need for battle-tested leaders, he voluntarily left the hospital and hitchhiked his way back to his unit near St. Lo, France. Arriving at the 2d Battalion Command Post at 1130 hours, 25 July, he found that his unit had jumped-off at 1100 hours in the first attack of "Operation Cobra". Still limping from his leg wound, Captain Urban made his way forward to retake command of his company. He found his company held up by strong enemy opposition. Two supporting tanks had been destroyed and another, intact but with no tank commander or gunner, was not moving. He located a lieutenant in charge of the support tanks and directed a plan of attack to eliminate the enemy strong-point. The lieutenant and a sergeant were immediately killed by the heavy enemy fire when they tried to mount the tank. Captain Urban, though physically hampered by his leg wound and knowing quick action had to be taken, dashed through the scathing fire and mounted the tank. With enemy bullets ricocheting from the tank, Captain Urban ordered the tank forward and, completely exposed to the enemy fire, manned the machine gun and placed devastating fire on the enemy. His action, in the face of enemy fire, galvanized the battalion into action and they attacked and destroyed the enemy position. On 2 August, Captain Urban was wounded in the chest by shell fragments and, disregarding the recommendation of the Battalion Surgeon, again refused evacuation. On 6 August, Captain Urban became the commander of the 2d Battalion. On 15 August, he was again wounded but remained with his unit.

On 3 September, the 2d Battalion was given the mission of establishing a crossing-point on the Meuse River near Heer, Belgium. The enemy planned to stop the advance of the allied Army by concentrating heavy forces at the Meuse. The 2d Battalion, attacking toward the crossing-point, encountered fierce enemy artillery, small arms and mortar fire which stopped the attack. Captain Urban quickly moved from his command post to the lead position of the battalion. Reorganizing the attacking elements, he personally led a charge toward the enemy's strong-point. As the charge moved across the open terrain, Captain Urban was seriously wounded in the neck. Although unable to talk above a whisper from the paralyzing neck wound, and in danger of losing his life, he refused to be evacuated until the enemy was routed and his battalion had secured the crossing-point on the Meuse River. Captain Urban's personal leadership, limitless bravery, and repeated extraordinary exposure to enemy fire served as an inspiration to his entire battalion. His valorous and intrepid actions reflect the utmost credit on him and uphold the noble traditions of the United States Army.