



Staff Sergeant Stanley Bender, U.S. Army Lithuanian Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient

The recent dedication of a National Memorial to the Veterans of World War II was long over due. The quickly passing years have decimated the ranks of our greatest generation. Like the national memorial, it is now a fitting time for Bridges to give thanks to those great heroes who fought in World War II. Due to the large number that served and many who have since passed away, we can not thank each personally. The author's own father and two uncles are among the list of these heroes. As a result, the author has taken the liberty to single one Lithuanian American World War II veteran, from among the ranks of countless thousands who fought and many who died for their country, to symbolize the story of all who served. The author was blessed to have had the opportunity to talk and correspond with this great man before he passed on.

The Congressional Medal of Honor was instituted during the American Civil War as the nation's highest award for valor. The decoration is conferred in the name of the Congress of the United States upon the recommendation of the President. Its recipients are officers and enlisted men who have distinguished themselves by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty, in armed combat with the enemy.

The first Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded, on July 12,

1862, in the middle of the Civil War and by the end of World War II only 2,199 American soldiers had earned the honor of wearing this decoration. The decoration itself is a gold five pointed star superimposed on a laurel wreath of green enamel. The center bears the head of the goddess Minerva the emblem of righteous war and wisdom. The center medallion is encircled with the words "United States of America". The decoration is worn from a light blue neck ribbon studded with thirteen white stars and hands from a horizontal bar bearing the word "Valor".

Many Lithuanians have served in the armed forces of the United States and these veterans are aware of this honored decoration. Yet few are aware that this, the highest decoration of the United States of America, was awarded to a Lithuanian American. Lithuanian American Staff Sergeant Stanley Bender was honored with this decoration for his service during World War II. Bender was born to Lithuanian immigrants, Andrew and Eva Bendoris, on October 13, 1909, in Carlisle, West Virginia. The family name was later changed to its present Americanized form of Bender. He was the youngest of seven children. Stanley's early years were spent in West Virginia, but he later moved to Chicago, Illinois, to live with a sister after his father died.

Due to the economic conditions at the time, Stanley was out of work, broke, and disheartened. He decided to give his life to his country and enlisted in the U.S. Army, on December 9, 1939, at the old Post Office in Chicago, Illinois. When asked by the recruiter where he would like to serve, Stanley said "just send me as far as you can!" The army

complied with his request and Stanley was quickly sent to the Van Cover Barracks in the State of Washington and also sent on a short detached assignment to Salinas, California. The displayed photograph of Sergeant Bender was taken at Salinas, California, during that assignment. He considered this photograph to have been the best ever taken of him. His military service during World War II would eventually lead him to the shores of France. While serving as a Staff Sergeant with Company E, 7th U.S. Infantry, 3rd Division, Bender would win the Congressional Medal of Honor.

How Stanley Bender earned our nation's highest honor can best be told in the words of the President of the United States. The following is taken from the official U.S. Government citation, which accompanied Bender's Medal of Honor.

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. On 17 August 1944, near La Londe, France, Staff Sergeant Bender climbed on top of a knocked out tank, in the face of withering machine gun fire which had halted the advance of his company, in an effort to locate the source of this fire. Although bullets ricocheted off the turret at his feet Staff Sergeant nevertheless remained standing bolt upright in full view of the enemy for over two minutes. Locating the enemy machine guns on a knoll 200 yards away he ordered two squads to cover him and led his men down an irrigation ditch, running a gauntlet of intense machine gun fire which completely blanketed 50 yards of his advance and wounded four of his men. While the Germans hurled hand grenades at the ditch Staff Sergeant Bender stood his ground until his squad caught up with him; then advanced

alone in a wide, flanking approach, to the rear of the knoll. He deliberately walked a distance of 40 yards, without cover, in full view of the Germans and under a hail of both enemy and friendly fire, to the first machine gun and knocked it out with a single short burst. Then he made his way through the strongpoint, despite bursting hand grenades, towards the second machine gun 25 yards distant whose two man crew swung the machine gun and fired two bursts at him, but Staff Sergeant Bender walked calmly through the fire and reaching the edge of the emplacement, dispatched the crew. Signaling his men to rush the rifle pits he then walked 35 yards further to kill an enemy rifleman and returned to lead his squad to the destruction of the eight remaining Germans in the strongpoint. His audacity so inspired the remainder of the assault company that the men charged out of their positions, shouting and yelling, to overpower the enemy roadblock and sweep into town, knocking out two anti-tank guns, killing 37 Germans and capturing 26 others. Staff Sergeant had sparked and led the assault company in an attack which overwhelmed the enemy, destroyed a roadblock, taking a town, seizing intact three bridges over the Maravenne River and capturing commanding terrain which dominated the area."

Signed Franklin D. Roosevelt

Since Sergeant Bender's award was received while the war in Europe was still raging, his Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded on January 22, 1945, by Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch, Jr., commander of the 7th U.S. Army, in a ceremony near the army's headquarters in France. Stanley was later promoted to Technical Sergeant and was briefly assigned to another replacement unit.

In the post war period, Bender returned to a prosperous civilian life with his family in Fayetteville, West Virginia. Though he would be honored at various dinners and functions

in his later life, Stanley was very humble about his great achievements during the war. When he returned home after the war, he was so modest that he did not even tell his fiancée about what he had done until sometime after they had been married. When anyone asked him what he did to deserve the honor, Bender would quietly say he did what anyone else would have done under the circumstances

The State of West Virginia also honored Stanley Bender, on September 21, 1954, by naming a bridge along the West Virginia Turnpike in his name. After a long and productive life, Stanley passed away at age 84, on June 22, 1994, like so many of veterans of our greatest generation without ever seeing the World War II Memorial constructed in their honor.



He was laid to rest with full military honors at High Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery, Oak Hill, West Virginia. Stanley was survived by a wife and daughter who have always been extremely proud of his military service. I am extremely proud just to have been given the opportunity of briefly having known this hero. Stanley Bender was an outstanding soldier, loving husband and father. Bridges Magazine and the author are proud to honor this Lithuanian American hero as a representative of all of our World War II veterans. They were truly America's finest generation.

Henry L. Gaidis

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many interests is military history.

Editor's Note: Staff Sergeant Bender's widow recently donated the Congressional Medal of Honor to the Balzekas Museum in Chicago.

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Adoptions From The Heart
Cherry Hill, NJ (plus other offices)
www.adoptionsfromtheheart.org

Illien Adoptions
Atlanta, GA
www.illienadoptions.org

3. Other Resources for Potential Adoptive Parents

Numerous resources exist for families considering adoption. This list provides some places to seek information about adoption.

• Yahoo! groups of parents adopting from Lithuania.
[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LithuanianAdoptions-General Info/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LithuanianAdoptions-General%20Info/) and
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lithuanian-adoptions/>

Both of these groups are open to families considering adoption from Lithuania, and consist of adoptive families—those waiting for children, and those who have completed their adoptions. One of the groups allows adoption professionals to join, and the other is limited to families only.

• FRUA. <http://www.frua.org>.

FRUA is an advocacy and support group of families who have adopted from Eastern Europe.

• Ivaikinimo tarnyba.
<http://www.ivaikinimas.lt>.

This is the official Lithuanian state adoption agency, a division of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

In summary, I would encourage every Lithuanian family which has room in their hearts and financial means to consider adopting a child from Lithuania. So many children spend their lives in orphanages, hoping and dreaming of having a family of their own. Although the process was long, arduous at times and time-consuming, its result – the addition of Daumantas to our family – was worth every hassle, every tear, every heartache. I only need to compare the pictures of Daumantas taken in Lopselis 18+ months ago to those of him today to see the profound impact the love of a family has had on him.

If you have any questions about this article or would like to discuss it, please feel free to contact the author directly at RutaKS@aol.com.

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