

## Ever Forward: The Story of Frank Peregory, Medal of Honor Recipient

By: Amanda Kutch, Local Historian

Frank Dabney Peregory was born April 10, 1916, in Faber, Nelson County, Virginia, the second of eleven children of James and Susie Allen Peregory. Sadly, their oldest and two youngest children died as infants, leaving Frank as the oldest surviving child in his family.

By 1930, James Peregory had purchased land in Albemarle County, near Esmont, and ran a small farm. In 1931, Susie Peregory contracted the influenza while pregnant with their 12<sup>th</sup> child and despite the doctor's best efforts, both she and the baby died. After her death, Frank left school and joined the Virginia National Guard in Charlottesville, and became a member of Company K, 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 29<sup>th</sup> Division, the Monticello Guard. From this point onward, his surname is listed as "Peregory" in the company records and that is how he is remembered by his fellow soldiers. Four years later, in 1935, James Peregory was found dead after drinking heavily for several days. In the blink of an eye, 19-year-old Frank and his seven surviving siblings were orphans and Frank's paycheck was even more important to his family.



Frank D. Peregory, May 1942 when he received the Soldier's Medal.  
Image from Fold3

On February 3, 1941, the Monticello Guard was mobilized into Federal service with seven officers and 92 men. Private First-Class Frank Peregory was among the men sent to Fort Meade, Maryland for one year of training. While home on a break, he married local girl Bessie Kirby in Charlottesville on July 5, 1941.

On January 10, 1942, around 3:30 a.m., Frank, with several members of the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry were in Hobucken, North Carolina, when their patrol truck slid off an icy road and into a deep canal. Two of the men were unable to free themselves and were rescued by their comrades. A third man, Private Major, was unconscious and submerged and Frank volunteered to enter the freezing water to rescue him. According to Col. E Walton Opie, Commanding Officer, Frank "cut a hole in the top of the truck and submerged twice before being able to bring Major to the surface. Peregory then followed Wilkerson and others for help, being forced to make the latter part of the journey on hands and knees because of suffering from the intense cold." For his heroic actions that day, Frank received the soldier's medal for heroism.

*Below:* Peregory's family donated his medals to the Stonewall Brigade Museum, where they are on display. Photos by John Simmons, used with permission.



Peregory's Soldier's Medal



Peregory's Medal of Honor



Peregory's Purple Heart

Frank was with the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry when they landed on Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944, where the men of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division played a critical role in Operation Overlord. Caught in some of the heaviest fighting that day, more than 800 soldiers from the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry were killed, wounded, or missing in action, giving the beach its nickname “Bloody Omaha”. Frank lived to see another day.

On June 8, 1944, Frank single-handedly obtained the surrender of nearly forty enemy soldiers near Grandchamp, France, and for his bravery, was awarded the Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration presented by the US government and the recipient must have distinguished themselves at the risk of their own life above and beyond the call of duty in action against an enemy of the United States. Frank is only the second Virginia Guardsman to receive this honor.

Frank’s citation reads as follows: “On 8 June 1944, the 3d Battalion of the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry was advancing on the strongly held German defenses at Grandchamp, France, when the leading elements were suddenly halted by decimating machinegun fire from a firmly entrenched enemy force on the high ground overlooking the town. After numerous attempts to neutralize the enemy position by supporting artillery and tank fire had proved ineffective, T/Sgt. Peregory, on his own initiative, advanced up the hill under withering fire, and worked his way to the crest where he discovered an entrenchment leading to the main enemy fortifications 200 yards away. Without hesitating, he leaped into the trench and moved towards the emplacement. Encountering a squad of enemy rifleman, he fearlessly attacked them with hand grenades and bayonet, killed 8 and forced 3 to surrender. Continuing along the trench, he single-handedly forced the surrender of 32 more riflemen, captured the machine gunners, and opened the way for the leading elements of the battalion to advance and secure its objective. The extraordinary gallantry and aggressiveness displayed by T/Sgt. Peregory are exemplary of the highest tradition of the armed forces.”

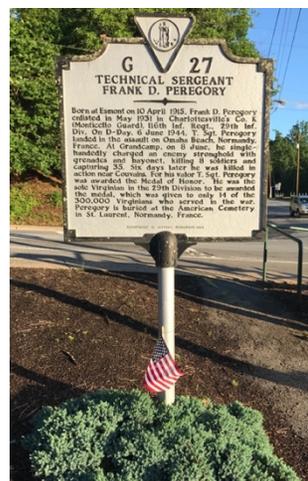
Frank never knew he received this great honor. He was killed in action in the hedgerows on June 14, 1944. Frank was buried in the Normandy American Cemetery, which is located on a bluff overlooking Omaha Beach. His wife, Bessie, would receive the Medal of Honor on his behalf. She never remarried.

Robert Patterson, Secretary of War, stated the actions of the 116<sup>th</sup> as “Deserving a place in American History as heroic as the charge of Pickett’s men at Gettysburg and the charge of Hancock’s men at the “Bloody Angle” at Spotsylvania.”

It is an honor and a privilege to remember Frank Peregory, and the men who served under “the Blue and the Gray” in World War II. Ever Forward.



Peregory's gravestone. Image from Wikipedia,



Historical marker located at the intersection of Ivy Rd. & Emmett St. in Charlottesville, VA. Photo by Amanda Kutch, used with permission