

Colonel Ira C. Welborn, Medal of Honor Recipient and Tank Corps Pioneer, Honored in Memorial Day Ceremony

by Captain (Major-Select), W. P. McLaughlin, USMC

Recently, I had the honor of attending a Memorial Day ceremony that highlighted a Medal of Honor recipient who is also a prominent figure in Armor history.

As an active duty advisor to a Marine Reserve unit in Gulfport, Mississippi, my mission is not only to train Reserve Marines for combat mobilization, but also to maintain a rapport with the local community. This is how I learned of Colonel Welborn's resting place here on the Gulf Coast.

My commanding general, Major General James E. Livingston USMC, was the guest speaker for the Biloxi, Mississippi Veterans Administration Hospital and National Cemetery complex's 1994 Memorial Day Remembrance.

General Livingston is an Infantry officer and a Medal of Honor recipient from the Vietnam War. As Commanding General, Marine Reserve Forces, headquartered in New Orleans, La., he was invited to speak at this occasion, honoring the dedication of a new headstone for a distinguished Army Medal of Honor recipient, Colonel Ira Clinton Welborn, Infantry, U.S. Army.

Local press commented:

"The ceremony singled out Col. Ira Clinton Welborn of Section 12, row 4, grave 12 as one of the nation's highest military honorees for valor during the Battle of San Juan Hill on July 2, 1898. On Monday (30 May 1994) there were no flags or floral arrangements atop his grave, but there was a new marker bearing a small gold replica of the Medal of Honor. (Author's note: This was written prior to Senator Cochran and Mrs. Elizabeth B. Welborn, daughter in-law paying their respects at the grave. The national colors were placed to honor Colonel Welborn).

"Officials learned in the last year that he received the Medal of Honor during a distinguished military career that ended in 1932."

Colonel Welborn was a member of the West Point Class of 1898. Assigned to the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment, as an Infantry company commander, 2LT Welborn participated in the Santiago Campaign, the Battle of San Juan. He was also recommended for two brevets for gallantry in the Battle of San Juan, July 1-2, 1898. During this battle, 2LT Welborn voluntarily left shelter and went under fire to the aid of a private of his company who was wounded. For this action, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Colonel Welborn's later military career included further combat in the Philippine Insurrection. Although not as well known as other pioneers, his influence was profound in the infant stages of the Tank Corps.

"...On 5 March [1918] the Secretary of War appointed LTC Ira C. Welborn, an Infantry officer awarded the Medal of Honor during the Spanish-American War, to serve as director of the Tank Service in the United States."¹

As a mentor to a young Army officer, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Colonel Welborn also had a profound impact on another generation of fighting men in the Second World War.

Colonel Welborn, as a combat experienced officer, gave the administrative oversight to produce tanks and train young soldiers to fight in France. He also had the foresight to believe that this new technological invention, would require technically competent officers. He endorsed the commissioning of Tank Corps enlisted soldiers into the



officer ranks to provide young, proficient, bold leaders with firsthand experience.²

Although Colonel Welborn eventually returned to the Infantry, his impact on the "young Turks" of the World War I Tank Corps was felt for years to come.

Endnotes

¹Treat 'Em Rough, *The Birth of American Armor 1917-20* by Dale E. Wilson, 1990, Presidio Press, p. 31.

²Ibid, pp. 64-69, 82, 209, 217.

I would like to credit the following individuals: Mr. Charlie Byrd, National Cemetery, Biloxi, Miss.; Mr. Scott Taylor, ACAP, Ft. Knox, Ky., coordinator for dedication of Welborn Hall 1992; and CWO4 Weisneck, USMCR, Marine Reserve Forces, Public Affairs Office, New Orleans, La.

Captain (P) William P. McLaughlin was commissioned through the NROTC program at The Citadel in 1983. He served in 2d Marine Division (MD) as a plt. cdr. and S-3A to include a deployment as the assault amphibian vehicle plt. cdr. for Marine Detachment, United American States XXVII to South America. He served as a rifle plt. cdr. for Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team Company and later as its XO and weapons plt. cdr., completing his tour at Marine Corps Security Force Battalion as the Security Force Training Center's training and operations officer. After completion of AOAC at Ft. Knox, he served as CO, D Co., 2d Assault Amphibian Battalion, 2d MD. He deployed with his company to Southwest Asia and supported the 6th and 8th Marines, and also 2d Tank Battalion during the ground offensive. He also served as a U.N. Observer in the Western Sahara. He also served as the CO of HQSVC Co. and is presently the inspector-instructor for 4th Plt. (Rein.) Co. A(-) 4th AA BN, 4th MD, FMF, USMCR. He has been selected to attend the Marine Corps Command and Staff College in 1995.