

Remembering the Heroes of the Military Order of the World Wars



Companion Colonel ERNEST HERBERT DERVISHIAN



Richmond, Virginia Chapter

Ernest Herbert Dervishian (10 August 1916–20 May 1984), recipient of the Medal of Honor, was born in Richmond and was the son of Mary Juskalian Dervishian and Hagop Artin Dervishian, Armenian immigrants who operated a candy store. Dervishian attended Richmond public schools and the University of Richmond, where he took premedical courses before deciding to study law. After passing the bar in December 1937 and receiving an LL.B. from the university's T. C. Williams School of Law in June 1938, he practiced law with his brother.

Dervishian enlisted in the United States Army on 12 September 1941 and was assigned to the 135th Infantry Regiment, part of the 34th Infantry Division. The regiment arrived in Northern Ireland for training in May 1942, by which time he had been promoted to sergeant. Sent to North Africa at the end of the year, Dervishian participated in the Tunisian Campaign through May 1943 and was promoted to staff sergeant in June. The division landed at Salerno, Italy, in September 1943.

During the Allies' Italian Campaign the 34th Infantry Division was sent to Anzio, a coastal city where Allied troops had bogged down in January 1944 after an amphibious landing. As noted in his Medal of Honor Citation, on 23 May, Dervishian, who had risen to technical sergeant, led four men on forward patrol as the Allies tried to break out of Anzio. Near the town of Cisterna, the team advanced on a German-held railroad embankment. He then used a captured submachine gun to fire at still another enemy dugout. Simultaneously firing with both hands in different directions, he forced five Germans in each position to surrender. Advancing alone, he captured a third machine gun nest and took six more prisoners.



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During the engagement, which lasted only about twenty-five minutes, Dervishian and his men captured three machine gun nests, killed many enemy soldiers, and took more than forty Germans prisoner.

After participating in the liberation of Rome in June 1944, he received a battlefield promotion to second lieutenant in July. For his efforts near Cisterna, Dervishian received the Medal of Honor in an official ceremony near the frontlines in Northern Italy on 12 January 1945.

He returned to Richmond late in January 1945 to a hero's welcome. The city honored him with a Dervishian Day on 1 February 1945 that included early closing of city government, schools, and many businesses, a ceremony attended by the governor and other leaders, and a parade that drew a reported 30,000 spectators. He also received tributes from the local Armenian community, the Richmond Bar Association, the city Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Richmond. Returning to active duty later in February, he was sent to postings in Oregon and in Maryland. In September 1945, by which time he had been promoted to first lieutenant, he was placed on terminal leave and returned home to Richmond the following month.

Formally discharged in November 1945, Dervishian rejoined his legal practice with his brother. Dervishian often spoke to civic groups about his experiences during the war. He was a member of the Military Order of the World Wars, Richmond Chapter. In 1946–1947 he served as National Vice Commander of the American Legion. In 1946 he represented veterans on the state construction committee of the federal Civilian Production Administration. Dervishian served as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Richmond from July 1947 to December 1959, when he left public service and returned to private practice.

On 10 December 1950 he married Anne Garoogian, a resident of Brooklyn, New York. They had three daughters. He served in the army reserves following the war, acting as a staff advocate general, before retiring as a colonel in 1968. Along with such cultural figures as actor Joseph Cotten and writer Tom Wolfe, Dervishian was one of thirty-five Virginians honored by the governor in September 1972 for outstanding national achievement in their fields. Following a short illness, Ernest Herbert Dervishian died of a cerebral infarction on 20 May 1984 in a Richmond hospital at the age of 67. He was buried in Westhampton Memorial Park in Henrico County, Virginia.



MOWW Medal of Honor Project

One of the 43 that I knew personally



Companion Colonel **ERNEST HERBERT DERVISHIAN**

Richmond, Virginia Chapter

RANK: SECOND LIEUTENANT
(RANK AT TIME OF ACTION:
TECHNICAL SERGEANT)

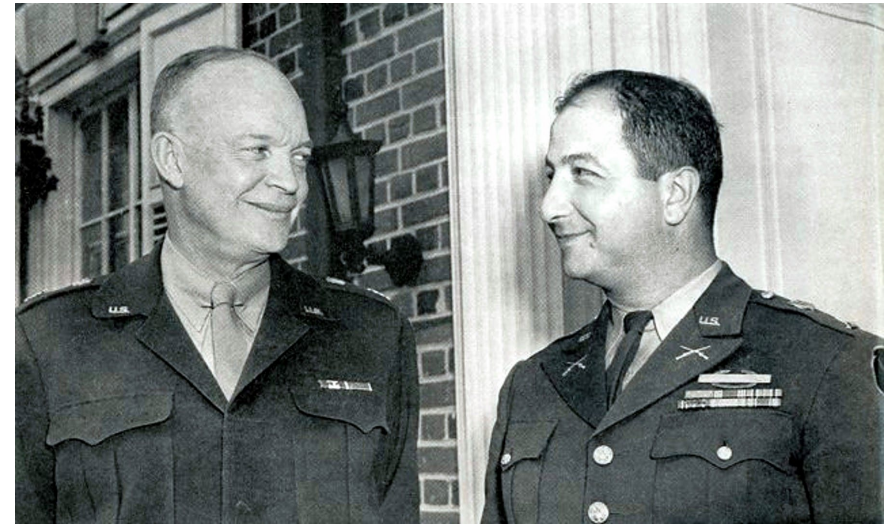
CONFLICT/ERA: WORLD WAR II

UNIT/COMMAND: COMPANY B,
133 INFANTRY REGIMENT,
34TH INFANTRY DIVISION

MILITARY SERVICE BRANCH: U.S. ARMY

MEDAL OF HONOR ACTION DATE: MAY 23, 1944

MEDAL OF HONOR ACTION PLACE: NEAR CISTERNA, ITALY





PRESENTATION DATE & DETAILS: JANUARY 12, 1945
AT PIAMAGGIO, ITALY - PRESENTED BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL MARK W. CLARK



CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty on 23 May 1944, in the vicinity of Cisterna, Italy. Second Lt. Dervishian (then TSgt.) and four members of his platoon found themselves far ahead of their company after an aggressive advance in the face of enemy artillery and sniper fire. Approaching a railroad embankment, they observed a force of German soldiers hiding in dugouts. Second Lt. Dervishian, directing his men to cover him, boldly moved forward and, firing his carbine, forced 10 Germans to surrender. His men then advanced and captured 15 more Germans occupying adjacent dugouts. The prisoners were returned to the rear to be picked up by advancing units.

From the railroad embankment, 2d Lt. Dervishian and his men then observed nine Germans who were fleeing across a ridge. He and his men opened fire and three of the enemy were wounded. As his men were firing, 2d Lt. Dervishian, unnoticed, fearlessly dashed forward alone and captured all of the fleeing enemy before his companions joined him on the ridge. At this point four other men joined 2d Lt. Dervishian's group. An attempt was made to send the four newly arrived men along the left flank of a large, dense vineyard that lay ahead, but murderous machine-gun fire forced them back.

Deploying his men, 2d Lt. Dervishian moved to the front of his group and led the advance into the vineyard. He and his men suddenly became pinned down by a machine gun firing at them at a distance of 15 yards.



Feigning death while the hostile weapon blazed away at him, 2d Lt. Dervishian assaulted the position during a halt in the firing, using a hand-grenade and carbine fire, and forced the four German crewmembers to surrender. The four men on the left flank were now ordered to enter the vineyard but encountered machine-gun fire which killed one soldier and wounded another. At this moment the enemy intensified the fight by throwing potato-masher grenades at the valiant band of American soldiers within the vineyard.

Second Lt. Dervishian ordered his men to withdraw; but instead of following, jumped into the machine-gun position he had just captured and opened fire with the enemy weapon in the direction of the second hostile machine-gun nest. Observing movement in a dugout two or three yards to the rear, 2d Lt. Dervishian seized a machine-pistol. Simultaneously blazing away at the entrance to the dugout to prevent its occupants from firing and firing his machine gun at the other German nest, he forced five Germans in each position to surrender.

Determined to rid the area of all Germans, 2d Lt. Dervishian continued his advance alone. Noticing another machine-gun position beside a house, he picked up an abandoned machine-pistol and forced six more Germans to surrender by spraying their position with fire. Unable to locate additional targets in the vicinity, 2d Lt. Dervishian conducted these prisoners to the rear.

The prodigious courage and combat skill exhibited by 2d Lt. Dervishian are exemplary of the finest traditions of the U.S. Armed Forces.



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A part of the
MOWW
“Heroes of Yesterday,
Models for Tomorrow”
Program

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TO CHERISH THE MEMORIES AND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE WORLD WARS WAGED FOR HUMANITY, TO ACQUIRE AND PRESERVE RECORDS OF INDIVIDUAL SERVICES AND TO ENCOURAGE AND ASSIST IN THE HOLDING OF COMMEMORATIONS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MEMORIALS OF THE WORLD WARS.