

# Melvin Biddle Reluctant Hero

## Anderson man, last living Hoosier Medal of Honor recipient, dies at 87

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By Rodney Richey,  
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**ANDERSON, Ind.** — Melvin E. “Bud” Biddle, the soft-spoken Anderson native who went on to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his role in World War II’s infamous Battle of the Bulge, died Thursday at Saint John’s Medical Center. He was 87.

Gov. Mitch Daniels, upon hearing the news, issued a statement saying, “We call them the Greatest Generation for a reason, and in Melvin Biddle we have just lost one of the greatest of the great. Every Hoosier is proud that our state produced such a man.”

Biddle was the last living Hoosier to have received the Medal of Honor. His death leaves a total of 86 living Medal of Honor recipients.

“It’s quite a loss to the community and to the state,” said Stephen T. Jackson, Madison County historian. “He was a hero, and we don’t have that many heroes today.”

Leona and Melvin Biddle, childhood sweethearts, had been married for 64 years. She said in a statement only one thing: “I’ve lost the love of my life.”

Linda Stanley, his niece, said that Biddle “was definitely my hero.

“He didn’t like to talk about the war too much, about what he did. He did quite a lot. What he did was amazing.”

It was Christmas 1944, when Pfc. Biddle found himself with the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment near Hotton, Belgium.

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A graduate of Anderson High School, Biddle had left his job with Delco Remy as a draftee into the U.S. Army. Now he was in the thick of the Battle of the Bulge, a last-gasp German offensive.

Though taken by surprise, the Americans fought back, in temperatures that reached below zero.

Biddle was scouting ahead for his unit when he encountered three German soldiers. Biddle quickly shot them all.

Then, the next night, Biddle was met with 17 German soldiers. Singlehandedly, Biddle engaged them, killing all 17, reportedly with 19 shots.

Less than a month later, Biddle took shrapnel. As he lay recovering, Biddle discovered that he had been nominated for the Medal of Honor, for what the order would later call “intrepid courage and superb daring.”

Biddle would always admit to a certain amount of fear while in combat, especially when he was out front.

“But I lost a lot of fear because I was out there and couldn’t let the troops down,” Biddle told Madison magazine in 2008.

According to family and friends, Biddle had led life on his own terms, shunning the spotlight except for the occasional interview. He never reveled in or glorified his exploits, say those who knew him, though he was within his rights to do so.

Former Madison County Circuit Court Judge Fred Spencer, himself an Army veteran, knew Biddle well enough that, rather than “Judge,” Biddle referred to him as “Spence.”

“It’s a cruel coincidence – or maybe fate made it happen that way – but he died on Dec. 16, which was the day the Battle of the Bulge started in 1944,” Spencer said Friday.

Toni Ledbetter, bar manager at American Legion Post 127 on Columbus Avenue, said that Biddle had always been a “very special person.”

“I’ve been here 18 years, and Bud was an everyday person,” Ledbetter said. “He’d never go around bragging about what he did.”

Biddle’s wife and family are Jehovah’s Witnesses, said granddaughter Lauryn Wicevic. To honor their beliefs, Biddle had requested his funeral not include a military observance.

According to Ledbetter, military honors will be rendered Monday night at the Legion.

“He was the best,” Wicevic said Friday. “He took care of all of us. He was the rock in our family. He was what held us all together.”

“It was a rare honor and pleasure to know one of Anderson’s real World War II heroes,” Spencer said.

“Probably the finest compliment that could be paid to him was by President Truman, who (speaking about the medal) told him on Oct. 12, 1945, ‘I’d rather have this than be president.’”