

= Cornelius H. Charlton =

Cornelius H. Charlton (July 24 , 1929 ? June 2 , 1951) was a soldier in the United States Army during the Korean War . Sergeant Charlton posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his actions near Chip'ari , South Korea on June 2 , 1951 .

Born to a coal mining family in West Virginia in 1929 , Charlton moved to The Bronx in New York City during World War II . Enlisting out of high school in 1946 , Charlton served first in occupied Germany , then occupied Japan in administrative duties before requesting transfer to the front . An African American , Charlton was transferred to the segregated 24th Infantry Regiment , 25th Infantry Division fighting in the Korean War . During a battle for Hill 543 near the village of Chip'ari , Charlton took command of his platoon after its commanding officer was injured , leading it on three successive assaults of the hill . Charlton continued to lead the attack despite mortal wounds until Chinese troops occupying it were destroyed , saving his platoon . For these actions , Charlton was awarded the medal .

In the following years , Charlton was honored numerous times , but was controversially not given a spot in Arlington National Cemetery , which his family claimed was due to racial discrimination . The controversy attracted national attention before Charlton was finally reburied in Arlington in 2008 .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Cornelius H. Charlton was born in East Gulf , West Virginia on July 24 , 1929 . He was the eighth of 17 children born to Van Charlton , a coal miner , and Clara (née Thompson) Charlton , a housewife . Cornelius briefly moved to Coalwood , West Virginia in 1940 to live with his brother , Arthur . In 1944 , the family moved to The Bronx in New York City , New York as Van Charlton became the superintendent of an apartment building . Cornelius Charlton enrolled in James Monroe High School . Friends and family knew Charlton as " Connie . "

Charlton indicated a desire to join the United States Army from a young age ; in high school he begged his parents to allow him to drop out and enlist , wanting to fight in World War II , but his parents refused . When Charlton graduated from high school in 1946 , he remained committed to joining the Army , so his parents signed the papers allowing 17 @-@ year @-@ old Charlton to enlist .

= = = Military career = = =

Charlton left for Basic Combat Training in November 1946 . As an African American , he entered the Army at a time when it was still segregated . In 1948 , U.S. president Harry S. Truman ordered desegregation of the U.S. military with Executive Order 9981 . However , many units remained de facto segregated , with African Americans mostly being pooled into service units and non @-@ combat duties . It would be several years before troops were fully integrated .

Upon graduating from basic training , Charlton was assigned to Allied @-@ occupied Germany , where he served out his whole enlistment . Charlton opted to re @-@ enlist , and his next assignment was with a military engineering battalion at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Aberdeen , Maryland .

In 1950 , Charlton was assigned to the Occupation of Japan , and was given an administrative job on Okinawa with an engineering group of the Eighth United States Army . However , Charlton indicated a desire to fight in the Korean War , and so he requested transfer to a front line unit in South Korea . He was subsequently assigned to C Company , 1st Battalion , 24th Infantry Regiment , part of the 25th Infantry Division . The regiment was one of the de facto segregated units , made up almost entirely of African American men led by white officers . From its arrival in September 1950 , the regiment had been plagued by poor performance and accusations of cowardice . Division

commander Major General William B. Kean had requested the unit be disbanded , finding the regiment " untrustworthy . "

Charlton arrived at C Company of the regiment 's 1st Battalion in early 1951 , and at first was regarded with suspicion by officers and leaders in his unit . A Sergeant , he was made a squad leader in the 3rd Platoon , and quickly impressed his unit 's company commander with his natural leadership ability , and soon his squad was considered a model unit . In May 1951 , Charlton was made the platoon sergeant and his commander had recommended him for a battlefield commission .

= = = Medal of Honor action = = =

In late May and early June 1951 , the Eighth Army launched Operation Pledriver , a concentrated effort to push Chinese and North Korean troops further north and out of South Korea . The 25th Infantry Division advanced as part of this operation . The 24th Infantry saw a slow advance during this operation , attempting to advance on Kumwha but encountering strong resistance . On July 1 , the 2nd Battalion , 24th Infantry took heavy casualties and was forced to withdraw to reserve positions , and the 1st and 3rd Battalions moved up to continue the advance .

On June 2 , C Company moved to capture Hill 543 near the village of Chipo @-@ ri . The hill was protected by heavily entrenched Chinese infantry as well as mortars at the top of the hill . During their first attempt to advance up the hill , the company took heavy casualties , and the 3rd Platoon leader was mortally wounded . Charlton took command of the platoon and reorganized it for another attack . Heavy fire eventually forced the company back down the hill .

Three times , Charlton led the platoon up the hill , in the face of intense Chinese mortars and infantry fire . In spite of mounting casualties , the platoon made slow progress . Charlton single @-@ handedly destroyed two Chinese positions and killed six Chinese soldiers with rifle fire and grenades . During one advance , Charlton was wounded in the chest , but he refused medical treatment and pushed the company forward . Charlton continued to lead the attack from the front of the platoon , and several times was separated from the unit . Subsequent accounts noted Charlton continued the advance " holding his chest wound with one hand and an M1 carbine with the other . "

Under Charlton 's leadership , the platoon managed to overcome the Chinese infantry positions , but it spotted a Chinese bunker on the far side of the top of the hill , where the Chinese mortars were firing on them . As recounted by Private First Class Ronald Holmes , one of the men in the platoon , Charlton decided to destroy the bunker , and with his last known words , " Let 's go , " he urged the platoon forward , charging at the front of the formation ahead of the rest of the soldiers . In one final action , Charlton advanced alone to the top of the hill and the location of the Chinese mortars , firing repeatedly on the emplacement there . The Chinese troops wounded Charlton one final time with a grenade , but he continued firing until the position was destroyed . Charlton subsequently died from the wounds inflicted by the grenade . However , he is credited with saving much of his platoon , which had been under heavy fire from the mortars .

= = = Burial and honors = = =

Charlton 's parents were presented with his Medal of Honor on March 12 , 1952 by Secretary of the Army Frank Pace .

In 1952 , the US Army renamed its New York @-@ based Ferryboat 84 , a ferry boat that traveled to Governors Island in the Upper New York Bay , for Charlton . In September 1954 , West Virginia renamed a bridge on the West Virginia Turnpike in honor of Charlton , the Charlton Memorial Bridge on Interstate 77 . Charlton was also memorialized in the Bronx , with a park in the Morrisania area being named for Charlton in 1952 , and in 1958 several gardens in Van Cortlandt Park in South Bronx were planted in his honor . These gardens are the site of annual Memorial Day gatherings of the local neighborhood where Charlton and other Bronx residents killed in the Korean War are honored . In 1993 , a new barracks complex for US Forces Korea in South Korea was also named in Charlton 's honor . In 2000 , the United States Navy commissioned the USNS Charlton , a Watson

@-@ class vehicle cargo ship . Charlton 's sister , Fairy M. Papadopoulos , served as the ship 's co @-@ sponsor .

There was some controversy over Charlton 's burial after his death . In 1951 , Charlton was not offered a burial plot in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington , Virginia , a custom which is routinely afforded to all Medal of Honor recipients . The US Army later claimed that this was due to an " administrative error , " but Charlton 's family believed the omission was due to racial discrimination . Instead , Charlton was buried in Bryant Cemetery , a segregated cemetery in Bramwell , West Virginia in 1951 . The military did not offer to rebury Charlton in Arlington until 1989 , and the family refused on the grounds that the oversight had been discrimination . Instead , American Legion Post 32 in Beckley offered to bury Charlton in their own cemetery . On March 10 , 1989 , Charlton was reburied there with full military honors at a ceremony attended by congressmen , several US Army generals , and an honor guard . Of 252 buried there , Charlton was the only African American . The controversy received national coverage when it was written about in the Los Angeles Times . On November 12 , 2008 , following efforts of other Medal of Honor winners , Charlton was finally reburied in Arlington National Cemetery , where his remains currently reside .

= = Awards and decorations = =

Charlton 's awards and decorations include :

= = = Medal of Honor citation = = =

Charlton was the second of two African Americans to be awarded the medal for the Korean War , the other being William Thompson who had been posthumously honored for actions with the 24th Infantry Regiment during the Battle of Pusan Perimeter . They were the first two African Americans to be nominated for the Medal of Honor since the Spanish ? American War , though several World War II veterans were later nominated . The two nominations had seen delays because unit commanders refused to submit their nominations .

Sgt. Charlton , a member of Company C , distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy . His platoon was attacking heavily defended hostile positions on commanding ground when the leader was wounded and evacuated . Sgt. Charlton assumed command , rallied the men , and spearheaded the assault against the hill . Personally eliminating 2 hostile positions and killing 6 of the enemy with his rifle fire and grenades , he continued up the slope until the unit suffered heavy casualties and became pinned down . Regrouping the men he led them forward only to be again hurled back by a shower of grenades . Despite a severe chest wound , Sgt. Charlton refused medical attention and led a third daring charge which carried to the crest of the ridge . Observing that the remaining emplacement which had retarded the advance was situated on the reverse slope , he charged it alone , was again hit by a grenade but raked the position with a devastating fire which eliminated it and routed the defenders . The wounds received during his daring exploits resulted in his death but his indomitable courage , superb leadership , and gallant self @-@ sacrifice reflect the highest credit upon himself the infantry , and the military service .