



Private James D. McRacken

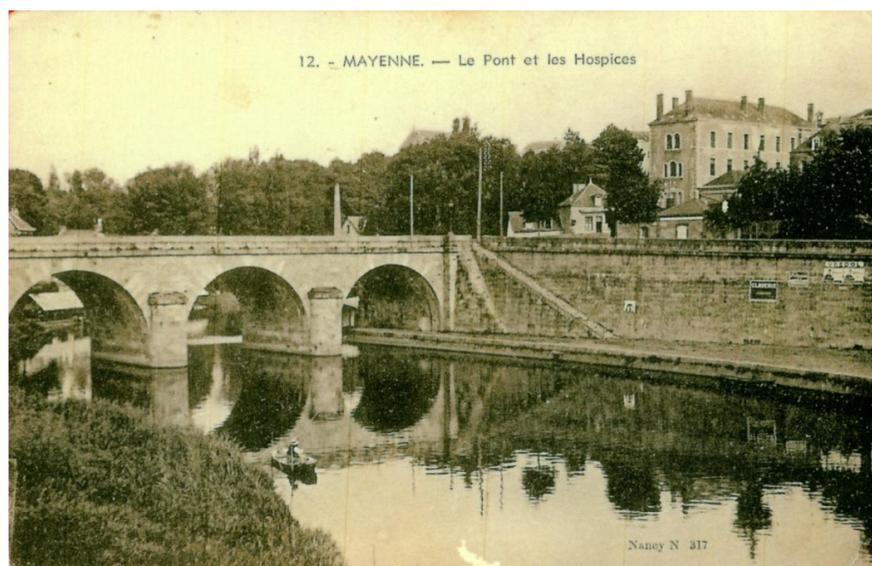


Private McRacken.

In October of 1943, James Dougald McRacken left his pregnant wife in his hometown of Red Spring, North Carolina, to answer his nation's call. Following training, McRacken had a short furlough to meet his newborn daughter. On his return, he was assigned to the newly formed Company A, 315th Engineer Battalion, 90th Infantry Division.

On June 6, 1944 (D-Day), the 315th Engineers landed on Utah Beach with the rest of the 90th Division. On August 5th the 315th Engineers were just 130 miles southwest of Paris, on a hill overlooking the small French town of Mayenne. A citizen of Mayenne warned the Engineers that the Germans had rigged Mayenne's only bridge with explosives. If the ancient stone bridge was destroyed, it would drastically slow the Allied advance and leave the people of Mayenne without this essential fixture of infrastructure.

As the Engineers fought their way into town, heavy volumes of German small arms, machine gun, and artillery fire slowed the advance. Knowing the Germans would detonate the explosives at any moment, Private McRacken sprinted the 500-yards to the bridge. Though his body was shattered by gunfire, Private McRacken continued forward



The actual bridge in Mayenne, France saved by Private McRacken.

and found the main control wire for the German explosive charges. He snipped the wires, then fell and died on the ancient stone bridge.

The French people who watched Private McRacken's death from a hillside came to the bridge, shrouded his body, and covered it with dahlias. He was officially declared the "Savior of Mayenne." Private McRacken lived up to all the Army Values and his actions allowed the Allies to continue their advance. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Speaking of McRacken's actions, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die so that freedom might live, and grow, and increase its blessings. Freedom lives, and through it, he lives - in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men."



Distinguished Service Cross earned by Private McRacken.