



Technician Third Grade Harold F. Sabath



Ten man inflatable boats like the ones used by the 81st Infantry Division at San Louis Obispo, California.

In January of 1943 three Engineers from the 1138th Engineer Combat Group were detailed to assist the 81st Infantry Division with amphibious training at San Luis Obispo, California. Missouri native Harold Sabath was one of these Engineers. As storm clouds rose on the horizon and the waves grew, Harold Sabath's sense of duty would be tested.

The rough seas threw the small inflatable 10 man boats around. As T/3 Sabath successfully navigated his boat to shore, he noticed another boat capsize in the surf zone. The powerful currents prevented the infantrymen from swimming to shore and slowly drug them toward a coral reef. As a few men rushed for a distant lifeboat, others watched in aghast as the turbulent seas carried the survivors toward the razor sharp rocks.

Before World War II Sabath had been a Red Cross lifeguard. He felt that as a certified lifeguard he possessed the skill to save the men, and knew it was his obligation to attempt a rescue. He tied a rope around his waist and dove into the rough surf. Swimming under water he reached the 10 men at the capsized rubber boat. He ordered all to kick their legs. With the effort of the now motivated survivors and the soldiers on shore pulling the rope tied to Sabath's waist, the stricken life boat edged toward the beach. Exhausted from the cold and exertion, three men separated from the boat and drifted back out to sea.

Realizing these men would surely drown, Sabath let go of the boat as it reached the shore and pursued the distressed soldiers.

He managed to reach all three and secured one with each arm, while the third climbed on his back. Others on shore used the rope to pull all four men to land.

Sabath's sense of duty saved the lives of ten soldiers. For his actions, Technician Third Grade Harold Sabath was awarded the Soldier's Medal.



The front (right) and back (left) of Sabath's Soldier's Medal.