

The Story of William “Sonny” Simon



William Laverne Simon, better known as Sonny to family and friends, was 19 years old when he enlisted in the US Army in 1943. Like so many of our young men of that time, PFC Simon was sent to Europe during World War II to fight the Nazis. The route of his unit, the 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, took them directly through the Hürtgen Forest, located on the Western Front near the Belgian-German border.

Not many people know about the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. The Hürtgen Forest is a man-made preserve, dense with firs, deep ravines, and high ridgelines. Treacherous terrain that made fighting difficult. Conditions were miserable. To add to the difficulty of this campaign, this area was one of the most secured of Germany's Siegfried Line, heavily protected by concrete pillbox fortifications, foxholes, mines, barbed wire, and artillery support.

From September 1944 to February 1945, American troops repeatedly attacked the enemy, taking heavy losses, and measuring their progress in yards, as they took German positions one at a time. While ultimately the mission was a success, the Army sustained severe losses through this exhausting campaign. During just the first three months of combat, American troops incurred an estimated 33,000 casualties. The dark and painful campaign is one of the longest battles in U.S. Army history.

Sonny wrote letters home to his mom every day...right up until the day he went missing. Sonny was only 20 years old when the War Department informed his family that he was missing in action since November 5, 1944. PFC Simon was named on the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA) list of 200 American soldiers still missing from combat in the Hürtgen Forest. His letters home are preserved at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

Sonny was a native son of Middleton, well known and well liked in our small town. He came from a good family. Close. Tight-knit. He was an athlete of some renown and starred in four major sports during his high school career. His family has suffered a devastating and heartbreaking loss.

In December 2022, the Simon family received notice from DPAA that Sonny's remains had been located and identified, words that every military family in this situation longs to hear. His return home to Middleton brought a sense of closure and rest to his siblings, loved ones, extended family, friends, and his local band of brothers and sisters.

Ceremonies to honor PFC Simon were held on Tuesday, March 28, 2022.

The public was invited to participate in the events. Flags state-wide were lowered to half-mast. Proclamations were read at the Capitol and our Middleton Council meeting. Our Veterans, Soldiers, our Governor, local military, neighboring military service groups, members of Middleton's town council, fire and police departments, and individual well-wishers joined the Simon family in the ceremonies held to honor Sonny's sacrifice.

Middleton's band of World War II Veterans honored William "Sonny" Simon by naming their new VFW post after him at its charter in 1946. We remember Sonny's ultimate sacrifice still by taking care of today's Veterans, and by making our philanthropic donations and fundraising drives in his name. Post members and family members rally together each Memorial Day for graveside honors.