

Arlo Laverne Olson

Born

20 April 1918
Greenville, Iowa

Entered Service

1941
Toronto, South Dakota
U.S. Army
15th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division

War

World War II

Action Date:

1943-10-13

Action Location

Crossing of the Voltumo River, Italy

Died

28 October 1943
Mount San Nicola, Italy

Buried

Fort Snelling National Cemetery (MH) (C-24-13787)

Presentation Date

16 September 1944

General Louis E. Hibbs presented the award to Arlo's
widow (Mrs. Myna Olson)
at Camp Ban Dom, Mississippi



Photo from South Dakota
Department of Veterans Affairs website

Early Years

Arlo Laverne Olson was born 20 April 1918 in Greenville, Clay County, Iowa to parents Frank Arthur Olson and Vera Kislingbery.¹ Arlo's sister, Delva Veryle Olson was born 4 August 1922 in Greenville.²

When Arlo was about ten years old he moved to Toronto, Deuel County, South Dakota with his parents, Frank and Vera Olson, and his sister, Delva. His father Frank was employed at a bank.³

The following excerpts were taken from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs website.⁴

"Arlo attended school in Toronto and was an active student. He was an avid reader of Zane Grey books, participated in basketball and pole-vaulting, and played the clarinet in band. He also achieved the level of Eagle Scout, something only about two percent of all Scouts attain. After graduating from high school in 1936, he attended the University of South Dakota, where he was

¹ "Iowa, County Births, 1880-1935," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XVNH-RKM> : accessed 31 May 2016), Arlo Laverne Olson, 20 Apr 1918; citing Greenville, Clay, Iowa, United States; county district courts, Iowa; FHL microfilm 1,434,999.

² "Iowa, County Births, 1880-1935," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XVNH-RTL> : accessed 31 May 2016), Delva Veryle Olson, 04 Aug 1922; citing Greenville, Clay, Iowa, United States; county district courts, Iowa; FHL microfilm 1,434,999.

³ 1930 U. S. census, Deuel County, South Dakota, population schedule, Toronto, Enumeration District (ED) 20-24, Sheet 3B, dwelling 73, family 77, Frank A. Olson; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 6 July 2016); citing NARA microfilm publication T626, roll 2222.

⁴ *South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs* (<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/> : accessed 5 July 2016) >Resources>SD Memorials>Medal of Honor Recipients>Captain Arlo L. Olson.

an ROTC cadet. In 1940, Arlo graduated from USO and went to work in a bank in Hallock, Minnesota. A year later he joined the Army. His pastor said 'Arlo went to war fearless'."

The War Years

"Arlo entered the Army on June 28, 1941, as a 2nd Lieutenant. His qualifications as a leader of men were soon evident, and he quickly rose in rank. He made 1st Lieutenant on February 1, 1942, and he was made Captain on December 1 of that same year. On Christmas Day in 1942, he married Myra Bordeaux of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. They wed in Natchez, Mississippi, where she was a radio announcer. After a few short months together, Capt. Arlo Olson was shipped overseas. He never returned."

Medal of Valor Citation

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On 13 October 1943, when the drive across the Volturno River began, Capt. Olson and his company spearheaded the advance of the regiment through 30 miles of mountainous enemy territory in 13 days. Placing himself at the head of his men, Capt. Olson waded into the chest-deep water of the raging Volturno River and despite point blank machine gun fire aimed directly at him made his way to the opposite bank and threw 2 hand grenades into the gun position, killing the crew. When an enemy machine gun 150 yards distant opened fire on his company, Capt. Olson advanced upon the position in a slow, deliberate walk. Although 5 German soldiers threw hand grenades at him from a range of 5 yards, Capt. Olson dispatched them all, picked up a machine pistol and continued toward the enemy. Advancing to within 15 yards of the position he shot it out with the foe, killing 9 and seizing the post. Throughout the next 13 days, Capt. Olson led combat patrols, acted as company No. 1 scout and maintained unbroken contact with the enemy. On 27 October 1943, Capt. Olson conducted a platoon in attack on a strongpoint, crawling to within 25 yards of the enemy and then charging the position. Despite continuous machine gun fire which barely missed him, Capt. Olson made his way to the gun and killed the crew with his pistol. When the men saw their leader make this desperate attack they followed him and overran the position. Continuing the advance, Capt. Olson led his company to the next objective at the summit of Monte San Nicola. Although the company was forced to take cover from the furious automatic and small arms fire, which was directed upon him and his men with equal intensity, Capt. Olson waved his company into a skirmish line and, despite the fire of a machine gun which singled him out as its sole target, led the assault which drove the enemy away. While making a reconnaissance for defensive positions, Capt. Olson was fatally wounded. Ignoring his severe pain, this intrepid officer completed his reconnaissance, supervised the location of his men in the best defense positions, refused medical aid until all of his men had been cared for, and died as he was being carried down the mountain."

Burial

Arlo's remains were returned to the United States, and aged 25 at his death, was buried in Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis, Minnesota (MH) (C-24-13787).



Post War Years

Arlo never got to meet his little girl, Myra (Sandra) Lavern Olson, who was born in December of 1943. In 1999 she was living in Baton Rouge with her daughter, Katrin Danielle Rouselle and granddaughter, Faith Mikel Rouselle.

For his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life and beyond the call of duty, Captain Arlo Olson was also awarded the Silver Star and the Italian Cross of Valor. A transport ship was named in his honor. To preserve his memory, the local Legion Post #81, Toronto, South Dakota, was renamed the Erickson-Olson Post in 1943.

**Compiled by Shirleen Ann Hoffman
Lake Minnetonka Chapter DAR**