

# Purple Heart awarded after 57 years

By Jesse Reeves

For The Journal

E-mail: Jesse.Reeves@thomnews.com

After more than 50 years, Carl Biggs has finally received his Purple Heart.

Biggs received the decoration 57 years after the injury occurred during World War II on the Mediterranean island of Sicily. It arrived, by mail, on Christmas Eve 1999 — his 81st birthday.

"I'm just happy with this," Biggs said. "I broke down and cried. I'm sentimental anymore. But you only have something like this happen once in a lifetime."

During the war, Biggs was a technician fourth grade for the 439th Signal Construction Battalion. He and his partners would search the land after the enemy would retreat and salvage cable for communications.

They were trained to use abandoned enemy cable, and, according to Biggs, were happy to since it was better quality than U.S.-made cable.

After the landings at Sicily, Biggs and his comrades started right away to establish communication lines.

Between the cities of Gela and Licata, Biggs was searching in a field when another person stepped on a land mine. He heard a click, a sound "like a covey of quail taking off" and an explosion. He looked down to see a four-inch piece of shrapnel stuck into his right foot.

The first casualty of B Company on Sicily, Biggs was rushed to medics to be patched up. Biggs requested to be reunited with his unit immediately and passed on recovery time.

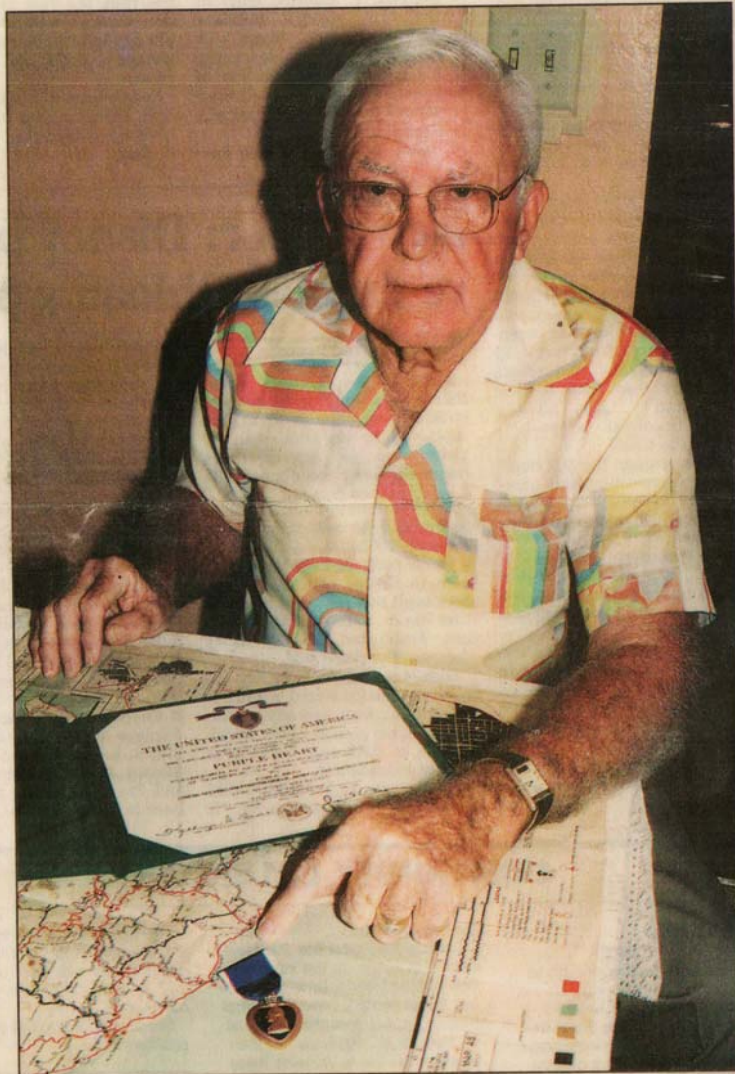
On crutches, Biggs went back to his friends as the fight for the island continued.

He was in the European theater of the war until its conclusion in 1945. Eager to get home to his wife, whom he had not seen in more than three years, he passed on seeing a doctor as he entered the United States. The wait was 10 days.

Biggs was told that by not seeing a doctor, no injuries would be recorded on his service record. Thus, no Purple Heart was awarded, which is the medal awarded to American soldiers injured in battle. The decoration was initiated by Gen. George Washington in 1782, whose likeness adorns the medal.

Preferring a reunion with his wife instead of a waiting for a military decoration, Biggs passed on the medal and went home to Martha.

See AWARD/A2



Linda Weisenborn/For The Journal

Carl Biggs of Lebanon points to the location of his injury during World War II on the Italian island of Sicily. A certificate and Purple Heart medal are atop the map. Biggs received his Purple Heart 57 years after his injury.

## Award: Purple heart

### Continued from A1

Later in life, Biggs realized that he had missed out on the recognition he had earned. Utilizing the services of a secretary of Veterans Affairs in Ocala, Fla., Biggs secured his rightful accolade.

In a letter from Lt. Col. Bernard P. Gabriel, chief of the U.S. Army's Military Awards Branch, Biggs was acknowledged as deserving his award "in recognition of your faithful and dedicated service to our Nation during a time of great need."

Now living in Lebanon dur-

ing the summer and Summerfield, Fla., in the winter, Biggs and Martha still look through all the war mementos remembering friends and wartime locations.

Some are letters from old friends vouching that Biggs was indeed injured in Sicily — one from the very medic who dressed the wound. Others are photographs of the race across Europe to Berlin and ultimate victory.

Somewhere in his house, he said, there's a four-inch piece of shrapnel he picked up while in Sicily.