

# Ronald Sparks

106th Infantry Division

May 30, 2005 - **BRONZE STAR COMES HOME AT LAST - Memories fill Orlando man's mind as medal is pinned on.**

**It has been more than 60 years since shrapnel tore into Ronald Sparks during the Battle of the Bulge and German soldiers took him prisoner, but the memories came back to him clearly Sunday when he received a belated Bronze Star for his bravery.**

**"He won it. He deserved it. He earned it. A little late getting it, but it's here," said the Rev. Hilton Davis, pastor of Conway First Baptist Church, where Sparks, 79, received the medal.**

**The medal ceremony was part of the church's Memorial Day service. Two ushers escorted Sparks and his wife, Hershel, to the pulpit. Sparks stood there solemnly, head bowed slightly, holding his wife's hand.**

**Fellow churchgoer Thomas Fair read aloud a letter from U.S. Rep. Ric Keller, who helped Sparks get the belated medal.**

**"Please accept my appreciation for your dedicated service to our nation during a turbulent time in our history," Keller's letter said.**

**Davis stood next to Sparks, holding the medal in an open black case. Hershel Sparks then took the case and pinned the medal on her husband. Parishioners applauded as Hershel Sparks stepped away, revealing the medal on her husband's suit jacket.**

**In 1947, a policy was enacted calling for soldiers such as Sparks, who had received the Combat Infantryman's Badge during World War II, to get Bronze Star medals.**

**"It wasn't really publicized well back in the '40s when they did this medal," said Mike Shutley, a spokesman for Keller. "A lot of old World War II veterans are realizing they didn't get it."**

**While researching churchgoers' military history for a Veterans Day service and display last year, Fair discovered Sparks should have gotten a Bronze Star. He started pulling together information necessary to correct the oversight.**

**Sparks served with the Army's [106th Infantry Division](#), helping fire an anti-tank gun.**

**"Our truck got hit and the radiator was blown in half," he remembered. "We ran until it was out of water, then we ran until it was out of oil. The engine blew up. We had to get on foot."**

**German tank divisions surrounded Sparks and his colleagues. Shrapnel from one of the rockets tore into his arms, head and leg. Finally, Sparks' regimental commander told his men, "I'm surrendering what's left of us because we don't have a chance."**

**"We destroyed our weapons and just stood there," Sparks said.**

**Sparks spent four months at the infamous [Stalag IX-B](#), also known as Bad Orb. It was**

**often regarded as the worst of the camps that held American prisoners of war. "The worst part was nothing to eat, and dysentery," said Sparks, who developed stomach problems as a result of both.**

**Sparks said he slept on a concrete floor covered only by straw. "That's where the lice came from," he said. "I can say that word and feel them. . . . I was in good shape when I went in. If you weren't in good shape when you went in, you didn't come out."**

**Sparks and other soldiers had to carry dead bodies out of the camp to be buried. Recently, he told his wife the dead soldiers were the ones who should get the Bronze Star medal, not him.**

**After his release from the camp, Sparks re-enlisted for another year. After he left the Army, he became a truck driver. He retired to Plant City and moved to Orlando four years ago to live closer to his son, also named Ronald .**

**Along with his son, two grandchildren and several great-grandchildren attended Sunday's ceremony.**

**The family plans to put the Bronze Star medal in a display case with his other military awards for Father's Day.**

**After the service, Hershel and Ronald Sparks stood near the pastor, shaking hands with parishioners as they left. The pastor's wife, Jane Davis, stood nearby, beaming at the sight. "God takes ordinary people and makes heroes out of them," she said.**

**Sandra Pedicini**, Orlando Sentinel (subscription) - Orlando, FL, USA

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