

MEDALS AND CITATIONS AWARDED TO
Jacob's Great-Grandfather, Ernst Grumbacher
For Service to the United States of America in World War II
Peter Grumbacher, January 2022

1. Bronze Star for heroic achievement of service
2. Purple Heart (2) for being wounded in action
3. European campaign medal
4. Victory medal
5. Army Presidential Unit Citation
6. Army Combat Infantry Badge
7. Third Infantry Division Patch
8. Good Conduct Medal for exemplar behavior, efficiency, and fidelity in active service
9. New York State Conspicuous Service Medal

Just take one look in the glass-covered box that contains my father's medals and ribbons and you'd know that his service to his country during World War II was exemplary. That box hung in our den along with numerous commendations. And what did my father have to say when I inquired why he received them? His infamous and truly annoying "*Ach!*"

As I've indicated on many occasions – especially when speaking about his experiences during the Holocaust and as a United States soldier, this was his three-letter dismissal, his "dis." When he didn't want to discuss it (whatever the "it" was at the moment), or when he felt something was irrelevant, "*Ach!*" came forth from his lips. Oh, yes, I forgot, there was no "*Ach!*" without a brisk wave of his arm/hand from shoulder to waist.

Getting back to the medals, my grandson Jacob was fascinated by them. Not remembering that "everything" can be found on the internet, Suzy suggested I look up their meaning. Sure enough, I found

them under “United States medals of WW II.” In fact, there was another link to medals from WW I, medals from Vietnam, medals from Afghanistan, medals from every conflict we ever had.

One medal was obvious and they even have a postage stamp honoring the medal and those who received it. It is the Purple Heart, indicating that the service person had been wounded in battle. My dad not only had the Purple Heart; he also had what’s called a “cluster” that’s pinned onto the ribbon of the medal. This means he was wounded more than one time.

He earned the Bronze Star “for heroic achievement of service.” He earned the Good Conduct medal “for exemplar behavior, efficiency and fidelity in active service.” He earned the New York State Conspicuous Service medal for, I guess “conspicuous service.” There were a few more I could mention but these are the highlights.

In all my years as his son he never spoke about the war, and he only spoke about being in Dachau when I pressed him over and over. I’m sure there was much more he didn’t tell me but I was so very grateful that I learned enough to make me appreciate his heroism in the face of such evil.

And talk about heroism, I couldn’t believe that a New York City newspaper would actually have a story published about his experience with a German unit and how he was able to get them to surrender. But when I read the story the full extent of his bravery (maybe “stupidity”?) came to light.

As I always tell groups, every survivor had “his story” which I combine to form “history,” and that “his story” became mine which I proudly related time after time. Sure there are those whose stories are more hair-raising; I’ve heard them. Nonetheless each individual story presents one aspect of life and death during those days when one didn’t know if the next day, indeed the next minute, would one’s last.

Just know that when I relate his stories I am well aware that had any one of them gone awry I wouldn’t be telling the story in the first place...I wouldn’t have been born.