

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY DECEMBER 9

West Virginia State Archives



**Herbert J. Thomas Memorial Hospital in South Charleston, named for the World War II Congressional Medal of Honor winner, opened on December 9, 1946.**

**CSO: SS.8.1, SS.8.7, SS.8.25, ELA.8.1**

**Investigate the Document:** (*The Charleston Daily Mail*, December 8, 1946; *West Virginia History*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, January 1956)

1. Why was the need for the construction of Herbert J. Thomas Memorial Hospital immensely stressed?
2. What initially prevented the second floor from being opened?
3. Why was the hospital named after Herbert J. Thomas?

**Think Critically:** According to Business Insider, West Virginia was ranked the 46<sup>th</sup> unhealthiest state in the country (2017), 48<sup>th</sup> in average income (2019), while CBC News alarmingly places West Virginia #1 in drug overdoses. In the long term, prosperous economies are associated with longer and healthier lives—do these statistics indicate why the healthcare industry has been an industry that has continued to grow in West Virginia? Why do you think a struggling economy can affect the population?

# The Charleston Daily Mail

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
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CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA, SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 8, 1946

## Thomas Hospital To Open Monday

The Herbert J. Thomas Memorial hospital in South Charleston will be opened Monday, it was announced Saturday by D. B. Benedict, president of its board of trustees.

Opening of the hospital, it was stressed, was decided upon because of the acute shortage of hospital space in this immediate area.

A. L. Bailey, administrator of the new institution, said a shortage of nurses will prevent the opening of the second floor of the north wing of the institution. He added that it will be made available to the public when qualified nurses become available.

The part of the hospital being opened will have 35 beds for immediate utilization.

The public has subscribed \$118,000 in a fund drive to make possible the opening and Mr. Benedict said the drive to reach the goal of \$125,000 would continue.

The hospital association that will operate the institution has leased it from the town of South Charleston for 35 years.

The new medical center is named for a South Charleston Marine who was killed in action in the Pacific theater and who was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Dr. J. Ross Hunter has been named chief of staff and Mrs. Mary B. Whitten is superintendent of nurses, Mr. Bailey said.

On this roll of World War II national heroes, whose gallantry and self-sacrifice was above and beyond all call of duty, are the names of Marine Sergeant Herbert J. Thomas, Jr., of South Charleston, who deliberately flung himself upon a live grenade to save the lives of his comrades in an action on Bougainville Island in the South Pacific, and Staff Sergeant Jonah Edward Kelley, of Keyser, 78th Infantry Division, who had his brief hour at Kesternich, Germany, when he, though sorely wounded, blasted a way to victory for his command through self-sacrifice. Second Lieutenant Robert E. Femoyer of Huntington, met every qualification when, caught in heavy anti-aircraft fire in a raid on Merseburg, Germany, and though mortally wounded stayed at his post long enough to set his battered and stricken bomber down at his base in England, and thus saved the lives of his eight fellow-crewmen. Technical Sergeant Clinton M. Hederick of Riverton, Pendleton County, an airborne infantryman, covered the retirement of his squad at Lembesk, Germany, but was cut down under heavy fire through German treachery. Then there was Private First Class Walter C. Wetzel, born at Huntington but entered service at Roseville, Mich., who threw himself upon grenades tossed by German attackers at Birken, and absorbed the full blast as they exploded. These five men died in the highest tradition of bravery, heroism, and self-sacrifice.

More fortunate was intrepid Marine Sergeant Hershel Woodrow Williams, of Fairmont, who carried a one-man war to the enemy defenses on Iwo Jima, blasting a line of pill-boxes with flame throwers to break the line of the Japanese inner forces, or Technical Sergeant Bernard P. Bell, of Point Pleasant, 36th Infantry Division, who survived the African and Italian campaigns to win his accolade for a most thorough job on the German forces at Mittelwihl, France. Technical Sergeant Stanley Bender, of Scarbro, also fought in the African and Italian campaigns and as a battle-wise veteran single-handedly broke a German line in France. Staff Sergeant Junior J. Spurrier, of Bluefield, 35th Infantry Division, working as a one-man army, took the town of Achain, France, and left a string of Nazi dead in his wake. And there is also Corporal Melvin Mayfield, Salem born, but now living at Nashport, Ohio—6th Infantry Division—who made a clean sweep of a string of Japanese em-

placements in Northern Luzon to save his comrades and two Filipino companies from a perilous position and possible annihilation. Williams, Bell, Bender, Spurrier, and Mayfield came back to take up the battle on the civilian front—and these five West Virginian Medal winners are all that can be traced as certainly living today.

In the most recent war—the affair in Korea—four West Virginians were awarded the Medal of Honor, all posthumously—not one of the men lived through their fiery ordeal to receive their decorations from the hands of the President. Second Lieutenant Darwin K. (Gus) Kyle, of South Charleston, 3rd Infantry Division, led a bayonet attack with 15 men when surrounded by enemy Chinese, covering his men with a hail of grenades thrown into enemy positions. A new school at South Charleston has been named in his honor. Private First Class Ralph E. Pomeroy, of Quinwood, a machine gunner, died using his weapon as a club in a hand-to-hand combat with an enemy unit which had over-run his position, thereby covering the withdrawal of his comrades.

Marine Staff Sergeant William E. Shuck, Jr., of Ridgeley, though twice wounded, refused to leave his men for treatment until all his dead and wounded were evacuated. In the instant that he stooped to pick up the end of a stretcher to carry out the last wounded Marine, Shuck was hit and killed by a communist sniper's bullet. The fourth hero was Sergeant Cornelius H. Charlton, 25th Infantry Division, born at East Gulf, but entered service from New York City. He took command of his platoon when the commanding officer was wounded and led three attacks which swept the enemy from the crest of a hill. He was mortally wounded while single-handedly knocking out the last enemy emplacement. A Negro soldier, he was the 44th man of his race to win the Medal of Honor. One of the bridges on the new West Virginia Turnpike bears his name, and the U. S. ferryboat which plies between New York City and Governors Island is the "Sergeant Cornelius H. Charlton."

Truly, it is a gallant little company. West Virginia cannot do less than to emblazon their names on tablets of bronze for placement in the rotunda of the State Capitol.