

# HAROLD A. FURLONG

## **Military Hero; Michigan's only Native Son\* to Officially Receive the Medal of Honor in WWI; Physician; Medical Educator and Community Philanthropist to the Arts**

Harold Furlong was born in Pontiac, Michigan Aug. 1, 1895. After graduating from Saginaw High School in 1914 he enrolled in Michigan Agricultural College which in later years became Michigan State University. He interrupted his college education to join the U.S. Army on May 10, 1917 in Detroit. Harold attended officer training at Fort Sheridan, Illinois and was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant of Infantry on August 15, 1917. He was assigned to Company M, 353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 89<sup>th</sup> Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. On June 4, 1918 his Division was sent to France.

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Harold A. Furlong was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on January 7, 1919 for his heroic action on November 1, 1918 near Bantheville, France. On February 9, 1919 upon the recommendation of General John J. Pershing, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Furlong's Distinguished Service Cross was elevated to the Congressional Medal of Honor. General Pershing personally pinned the Medal of Honor on Harold's uniform at his headquarters at Chaumont, France.

### **The Medal of Honor Citation reads:**

*Immediately after opening of the attack near Bantheville, France when his Company was held up by severe machine gun fire from the front, which killed his company commander and several soldiers, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Furlong moved out in advance of the line with great courage and coolness, crossing an open space several hundred yards wide. Taking up a position behind the line of machine guns, he closed in on them, one at a time, killing a number of the enemy with his rifle, putting 4 machine gun nests out of action, and driving 20 German prisoners into our lines.*

After the War, Harold Furlong returned to Michigan and entered the University of Michigan where he completed his undergraduate degree. He then attended the Medical School, graduated with the class of 1924 and then entered a Residency in OB-GYN. He and his wife, Frances, made their home in Pontiac where Harold practiced OB/GYN. Dr. Harold A. Furlong served in the Michigan Army National Guard from Dec. 16, 1921 until he was reactivated Dec. 26, 1940 for service as Colonel in the Army Medical Corps. Colonel Harold A. Furlong served as a Corps Surgeon Administrative Officer for more than five years which included nearly fourteen months in the European theater during WWII.

Dr. Furlong was awarded the Bronze Star Medal. His citation from Major General John B. Anderson, Commander XVI Corps United States Army reads: *Colonel Harold A. Furlong, ..., Medical Corps, Headquarters XVI Corps, United States Army, for meritorious achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy from 1 to 24 February 1945, in Holland and Germany. Through experience gained on the battlefield, Colonel Furlong coordinated and supervised the medical services*

*of the Corps and its attached units with such brilliance that wounded were treated rapidly and were expeditiously evacuated to the rear... The high regard for human life displayed by this outstanding officer inspired all other medical personnel in the performance of their duty and instilled confidence and courage in the hearts of the combat troops. Colonel Furlong's devotion to duty tremendously aided the stellar performance of the XVI Corps in battle and contributed illimitably to the successful accomplishment of its appointed mission. ...*

Colonel Furlong returned to the States on the U. S. Army Hospital ship *Frances Y. Slanger* October 22-31, 1945. He was separated from Active Duty February 13, 1946 at Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

Dr. Harold A. Furlong returned to his home town of Pontiac, MI to continue his OB-GYN practice and to Pontiac General Hospital. In later years, Dr. Furlong became head of the Department of OB/GYN at Pontiac General Hospital where he founded the OB/GYN Residency Program and became its first Director. This Residency Program which Dr. Furlong directed, graduated several OB-GYN specialists over the years who remained in the area to practice OB/GYN and serve the medical needs of women in this Oakland County community.

### **How I knew Dr. Harold Furlong:**

After completion of my Residency in Pediatrics at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Pontiac, I entered active duty as Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps and served as a staff Pediatrician at the U.S. Navy Hospital Charleston, S.C. from 1965-67. At the age of thirty, I returned to Pontiac after separation from active duty and became a member of the Medical Staff at Pontiac General Hospital. Dr. Furlong was forty-two years my senior.

I had known of Harold through a conversation with my Uncle George Herrmann, Harold's classmate at the University of Michigan Medical School Class of 1924. At the time of our conversation, my Uncle was Chairman of the Department of Cardiology, University of Texas, Galveston. Uncle George encouraged me to meet his friend and classmate, Harold, when he learned I was planning to go to Pontiac for my post-graduate medical training. However, I took my Internship and Pediatric Residency at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Pontiac and then I had two years of active duty with the Navy before returning to Pontiac in 1967. It was then that I had the opportunity to meet Harold and to be on the Medical Staff with him at Pontiac General Hospital.

My knowledge of Dr. Furlong and my interactions with him were on a professional basis, only, relating to our medical specialty disciplines. I was honored to care for several newborns he delivered over the next few years prior to his retirement. I knew Harold as a private individual, especially about his past. At no time did I ever have a conversation with Harold about his time in the Army during either WWI or WWII. I was aware through conversations with others that it was not something he was willing to talk about. I can best illustrate this by a well-known situation I learned of in later years after Harold had passed. A reporter from the Detroit Free Press once asked Harold what he thought of his legacy as a military hero. Harold rejected the notion as merely doing his duty at the time, and he told the reporter he much preferred to be remembered as a physician and as a teacher of physicians.

### **Patron of the Arts**

Harold, an amateur artist of water color painting, along with his wife, Frances, an artist(music) in her own right, founded the Pontiac Creative Arts Center in 1964. The PCAC is a non-profit whose mission is to cultivate arts and culture in the community through exhibitions, education and outreach. The Furlongs left an endowment to help fund the PCAC to insure it would continue to serve the educational and cultural needs of the community. Currently, the leadership of the PCAC is in the planning stages of a community-wide recognition and celebration to honor their founder and benefactor Dr. Harold A. Furlong. Dedicated space will be set aside in the building that is now home to the PCAC and was once the Pontiac Library to display memorabilia that honor Harold as a community leader.

Dr. Harold A. Furlong died July 27, 1987 at the age of 92 and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, Pontiac, MI.

### **American Legion Post #339 named to honor Harold A. Furlong:**

Three former medical colleagues of Dr. Harold A. Furlong and Veterans in their own right, Bruce T. Lessien, M.D., Billy B. Baumann, M.D. and David H. Dinger, M.D., led the effort in 2007 to name their American Legion Post #339 Department of Michigan, the Harold A. Furlong American Legion Post #339. The Post located in Bloomfield Township, merged in 2021 with its sister Post #341 of Sylvan Lake Michigan. **The resulting new entity is the Harold A. Furlong American Legion Post #341.** We now serve the communities of Sylvan Lake, Bloomfield Hills, Pontiac, Orchard Lake, Keego Harbor and the Townships of Bloomfield and West Bloomfield.

\* Harold A. Furlong wasn't the only Michigan man to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in WWI. Robert Guy Robinson was born in Wayne, MI in 1895. On May 22, 1917 he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in Chicago, IL. Robinson was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic action as an aerial machine gunner over Pitthem, Belgium on October 14, 1918. He was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant in November 1918. Robinson died in St. Ignace, MI in 1974. Due to his enlistment in Illinois, he is not recognized as a Michigan Medal of Honor recipient.

### **Acknowledgements:**

I wish to thank Larry Hathcock for his contributions, guidance and steadfast research. Larry is an historian who had a career as an educator in the Holly, MI Schools. He is a lecturer of Harold Furlong, a friend and fellow member of the Harold A. Furlong American Legion Post #341.

A special recognition and "thank you" goes to Billy B. Baumann, M.D., my long time proof-reader and editor of Post minutes and documents. Dr. Baumann spent his career as a Pathologist on the Medical Staff of Pontiac General Hospital and thus had a close relationship with Dr. Harold A. Furlong. Billy has been my long time colleague, friend and fellow member of the Harold A. Furlong American Legion Post #341.

David H. Dinger, M.D.

University of Michigan Medical School Class of 1962

Adjutant and Historian

Harold A. Furlong American Legion Post #341

[www.legionpost341.org](http://www.legionpost341.org)

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