

Dan Daly

The Medal of Honor is awarded in the name of Congress to a person in the Armed Forces who distinguishes him or herself by gallantry and intrepidity, by risking life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in military action against any enemy of the United States. The first Medal of Honor winner was Irish born and 257 of the recipients of America's highest military honor were born in Ireland. Nineteen fighting men have been double winners of the Medal, eight being Irish-born or Irish-American. One of those Irish-American double winners of the Medal of Honor is the subject of this article, the indomitable Marine, Dan Daly.



Daniel J. Daly was born on November 11, 1873, in Glen Cove, NY. He earned his first "combat medals" in New York City by whipping rival newsboys for the best corners and at the age of twelve became a semipro boxer in sports clubs while still selling papers. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on January 10, 1899. Raymond T. Tassin's chapter on Daly in his book *Double Winners of the Medal of Honor* describes Daly as a man "with jutting chin and flint eyes, he stood five-feet six inches and 130 pounds of rompin', stompin', destruction." He is perhaps best remembered for his famous battle cry during the fighting in France in WWI in the Battle of Belleau Wood. Leading

an attack on the German position while outnumbered, outgunned and pinned down, he is quoted as having said, "Come on, men- COME ON! Do you want to live forever?" For this action he earned the Navy Cross.

Daly earned his first Medal of Honor during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. China, at this time, had been divided by six great powers— Russia, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Japan— into "spheres of influence." Although the United States was not involved in the exploitation of china, we had missionaries and a small legation in Peking. Asecret society of Chinese dissidents became active in 1899 to rid China of foreigners and Christian missionaries and their converts. The Imperial Army of China lacked the unity and military might to repel the unwanted occupiers, so the "I Ho Chuan" (Fists of Righteous Harmony) were encouraged by the Empress of China to drive the foreigners into the sea. The Westerners called these fighters

"Boxers," a nickname derived from the I Ho Chuan practicing gymnastics and calisthenics. On May 10, 1900, Daly's company arrived at Peking. The American force and troops of other nations were able to enter the foreign compound which was under siege by the Boxers. The final siege of Peking was under way as the Imperial Army joined the Boxers, making 50,000 Chinese against 400 defenders. The American Marines and other foreign soldiers were involved in many skirmishes during the three month siege of the foreign compound and on 14 August 1900, Daly performed the action which earned him his first Medal of Honor. The action consisted of Daly volunteering to creep out in front of a position that needed to be reinforced to hold back the Chinese while repairs were made on the fortress. During the night Daly defended his position as small batches of Chinese attacked with rifles, spears and arrows. Using his bolt action Lee rifle and bayonet, Daly killed over 200 Chinese. The author Dr. Raymond Tassin suggests that this count maybe be exaggerated but not by much. Out of this action the legend of Daly was formed.

Following the Boxer Rebellion, Daly, now holding the rank of gunnery sergeant, served in some of the "banana wars," fought the flames on a cruiser that saved the lives of 500 men, fought the Mexicans in Vera Cruz where he distinguished himself in a one man attack on snipers which allowed his men to advance on the town.

The legend of Sergeant Daly was further enhanced when in 1915 U.S. seamen and Marines landed in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. For decades the Haitian republic had been unstable and corrupt accompanied by revolution and assassinations. The head of the government was usually the man backed by the Cacos, a gang of thousands of bandits. Each of the governments had borrowed heavily from European countries which were threatening to send military forces to collect their debts. To prevent such intervention, President Wilson invoked the Monroe Doctrine in order to protect American lives in Haiti and to restore order to the republic. As a result of our enforcement of the Doctrine, United States bluejackets and Marines were to secure the country.

The area of Port-au-Prince was made stable but the mountainous areas were ruled by the Cacos. Their strongholds were hidden in three areas of about 20 to 60 miles. The regimental colonel decided 3,000 Marines would be needed to sweep the area and locate the strongholds. Major Smedley Butler (with Daly, the only Marines to receive two Medals of Honor) volunteered to accomplish the job with twenty-six Marines, which would include the now forty-one year old Sergeant Daly. After riding into the mountains, the Marines encountered the Cacos with their patches of red on the arm or chest. Realizing they could not take the stronghold , the Marines withdrew so

as to report their findings. On the way back they were fired on and found that their guide had led them into a trap. Upon crossing a river in the dark, all twenty-seven Marines made it across but twelve pack mules died from the bullets, with loss of supplies and their machine gun. Sergeant Daly crawled to the river and managed to retrieve the machine gun. He later made three more trips to the water to get the .30 caliber ammunition. According to various accounts, Daly had killed from one to seven Cacos with his knife on the way to the river. He now carried the two hundred pound load back to the Marine position where he took the machine gun apart, cleaned it, and reassembled it for firing. The machine gun manned by Daly kept the Cacos at bay until the Marines attacked their stronghold and killed seventy-five without losing a man. They returned to base and later two companies of Marines and sailors routed the Cacos and destroyed their strongholds. For this action Daly received his second Medal of Honor. The second citation is six times longer than the first but ends with "G/Sgt. Daly fought with exceptional gallantry against heavy odds throughout the action."

Three years later, the now forty-five year old Daly managed to get duty in France in WW1. At the time that Daly arrived in France, the Germany Army had broken through the French line on May 28, 1918. The Germany Army was within forty miles of Paris. If the Allies could not hold the line it might knock the French out of the war. Daly's regiment, the Sixth Marines and the American Army Fifth, was assigned to the southern end of the Germany offense, their deepest penetration. This was a forested area known as Belleau Wood. Daly commanded the 73rd machine gun company of the Sixth Marines. On the afternoon and evening of June 5, 1918, the Germans fired 2,000 artillery shells into a section around Daly. One of the shells started a fire in a nearby ammunition dump. Daly rounded up "volunteers" and snuffed out the fire. On June 6, the Germans bombarded his sector so severely that Daly left the protection of the trenches and walked in the open from one gun emplacement to another to calm his men.

In Tassin's book *Double Winners of the Medal of Honor*, he reports that on June 10, "a German heavy machine gun crew sneaked in close to Daly's position and opened fire. Daly reacted completely in character, grabbing some grenades and charging. Near the German machine gun he dived into a ditch long enough to toss three grenades, silencing the weapon. Then he drew his .45-caliber pistol and continued his charge. He shot the officer commanding the gun crew, then swung his pistol on the fourteen enlisted men still alive. They promptly surrendered." The battle for Belleau Wood was the first offensive victory for the American forces, but at a cost of 8,000 casualties.

These acts of courage on June 5-7 and 10, 1918 resulted in his

recommendation for another Medal of Honor. He was turned down as the military authority did not think anyone should receive three Medals of Honor. Instead he received the second highest decoration, the Navy Cross and Distinguished Service Cross and from the French the Medaille Militaire. General Pershing offered him a battlefield commission which he turned down. He refused the offer of a commission because he would rather be "an outstanding sergeant than just another officer."

Daly later led an attack in the Meuse-Argonne assault, receiving a bullet wound in the shoulder and a shrapnel wound in the leg. He then served with the American Army of Occupation in Germany after the armistice, which he considered "not a bad birthday present."

He retired after twenty years of service in 1919 with the rank of Sergeant Major, partially to get away from the newspaper publicity that followed him wherever he went. He never married and was reported as saying, "I can't see any single man could spend his time to better advantage than in the Marines." Later he worked as a bank guard on Wall Street for seventeen years (Pity the larcenous fool who came near a bank guarded by Dan Daly!) and died of a heart attack on April 28, 1937 in Glendale, Queens at the age of 63. He is buried at Cypress Hills National Cemetery.

Dan Daly's story is told to every Marine recruit, an icon to represent the proud Marine fighting spirit. Our nation, too, has taken note of Daly's exploits on its behalf. A destroyer, the USS Daly, was named in his honor, and on November 10, 2005, the United States Postal Service issued its Distinguished Marines stamps which honors four Marines including the indomitable Daniel Daly.



(Written by Joseph McCormack, September 2006)

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