

## Irish Medal of Honor Recipients

Contributed by Brian P. Hegarty Jr.



The Medal of Honor is the nation's highest medal for valor in combat that can be awarded to members of the armed forces. During the waning days of December 1861, President Abraham Lincoln signed a Congressionally approved bill creating 200 "medals of honor," specifically for enlisted Navy personnel. In July 1862, President Lincoln authorized 2,000 Army medals. Like the Navy medals, these were to be "presented, in the name of the Congress" to enlisted personnel who "distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldier-like qualities" during the Civil War.

As of January 1, 2022, 3515 Americans have been awarded the Medal of Honor. Thirty-three countries are listed as the birthplaces of the recipients, and Ireland with 258, has the most by far. More than 2,100 (approximately 59%) have been awarded to service members with Irish heritage. Father Timothy O'Callahan, who was not only the first Catholic Chaplain to receive the Medal of Honor, but the first of any faith to be so recognized. Nineteen men have been awarded the medal twice. Five of these 19 men were born in Ireland. They are Henry Hogan from Co. Clare, John Laverty from Co. Tyrone, John Cooper from Dublin, John King from Co. Mayo, and Patrick Mullen (Co. of origin is not listed). Three double Medal of Honor recipients were Irish Americans: U. S. Marines Daniel Daly and John Joseph Kelly, and U. S. Navy's John McCloy.



Perhaps the most celebrated of the eight service members of Irish heritage is Marine Corps Sergeant Major Daniel "Dan" Joseph Daly (1873 – 1937) who is one of only two marines to receive the Medal of Honor twice and nominated for a third. Daly was lauded by Major General John A. Lejeune, Commandant of the Marine Corps, as "the outstanding Marine of all time." Outside of his celebrated military service spanning thirty years there is little known about Daly. Daly was born to an Irish American family in Glen Cove, Long Island, New York. He stood at 5 foot 6 inches tall and weighed 132 pounds, his physique was small compared to the other marines. Although described as "a quiet mannered, modest and unobtrusive" man, the young Daly was a respected amateur boxer. He was also a newsboy who competed against other newsboys for the best street corners for selling

newspapers. In 1899, at the age of 26, Daly was motivated to join the Marine Corps for the Spanish American War. The War was over before Daly completed recruit training; however, it would not be long before he would encounter his share of battle from the Boxer Rebellion through the First World War.

Soon after Daly finished training, he was shipped to China to serve in Peking (now Beijing), during the Boxer Rebellion. Standing alone through a hellish night while his captain went to gather reinforcements, Private Daly fiercely defended the Tarter Wall which was a 45-foot-high brick wall situated south of the American diplomatic compound. Armed only with his bolt action M1895 rifle with fixed bayonet the young Marine single-handedly fended off repeated sniper attacks and about 400 soldiers tried to storm the wall until backup arrived. His valor in action that day earned him his first Medal of Honor, which he received in December 1901.

During the summer of 1915, a revolt in the Republic of Haiti had begun to jeopardize American lives and property. The 15<sup>th</sup> Company (Mounted), 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Regiment, were ordered to carry out extensive patrols into the country's interior to seek out revolutionary fighters known as Caco bandits. At one point, several of Daly's comrades had been taken prisoner. He tunneled under the walls of the prison where they were being held, killed the guards, and set his men free. However, what earned him a second Medal of Honor happened in October during a reconnaissance mission. The Company was crossing a deep river ravine when they were ambushed on three sides by enemy Caco rebels, and their horse carrying a heavy machine gun was killed. Gunnery Sergeant Daly retrieved the machine gun by defying heavy fire and engaging in knife fighting against seven Cacos. He strapped the machine gun to his own back and returned it to his men, thereby saving the 15<sup>th</sup> Company from disaster and was instrumental in capturing Fort Dipitie.

Daly was not yet finished. During World War I, at the battle of Belleau Wood, France during June 1918, while assigned to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Machine Gun Company, the Marines were outnumbered, outgunned under a heavy artillery barrage and pinned down. Realizing that staying put would lead to certain death, the 44-year-old Daly led a counterattack with a battle cry that made legends. First Sergeant Daly famously ordered an attack and leapt forward, shouting this battle cry to his beleaguered men: "Come on, you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?" in an effort to motivate the troops to continue to fight. Daly, armed with only a .45-caliber pistol and hand grenades, single-handedly charged, and eliminated the Germans. Daly's repeated and fearless deeds of heroism at Belleau Wood merited him a third nomination for the Medal of Honor. His actions earned him the Army Distinguished Service Cross and the Navy Cross. The French Government presented Daly with the Medaille Militaire, the Croix de Guerre with Palm and the French Victory Medal.

Two-time Medal of Honor recipient Major General Smedley D. Butler said it best, he called Daly "The fightingest Marine I ever knew." Daly was offered a commission many times throughout his 30-year career, but always turned it down on the grounds that he would rather be an outstanding sergeant than "just another officer."

Daly retired from military service in 1929. SgtMaj Daly pursued a private life working a low-profile bank guard job on Wall Street in New York City for seventeen years. He died in 1937 having never married. He was married to the Marine Corp. Daly is buried at Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. In 1943, the Navy commissioned the USS Daly in his honor. Both of his Medals of Honor are housed at the National Museum of the U.S. Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia.