



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Sergeant Major Dan J. Daly

Sergeant Major Dan J. Daly, who Major General John A. Lejeune once proclaimed “the outstanding Marine of all time,” is one of only two Marines to have received the Medal of Honor twice for separate acts of heroism. Little is known about his early life other than being born in Glen Cove, Long Island, New York, on 11 November 1873. Daly enlisted in the Marine Corps on 10 January 1899 in the hopes of serving in the Spanish-American War. The war ended before he finished recruit training, and he was sent instead to China during the Boxer Rebellion. While there, he single-handedly defended a position against Chinese assaults, earning him his first Medal of Honor. Fifteen years later, he earned a second Medal of Honor while in Haiti, saving his company during an enemy action that lasted an entire night.



Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

Daly deployed to France during World War I and participated in the major Marine offensives. His exploits during the war included extinguishing a fire in an ammunition dump, going from position to position to encourage his Marines while they endured a heavy artillery barrage, single-handedly attacking and seizing an enemy machine-gun emplacement, and evacuating wounded while under fire.

Despite his slight build (5 feet, 6 inches tall and 132 pounds), Daly garnered a reputation

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as strong-willed and scrappy, leading Major General Smedley D. Butler to call him the “fightinest Marine I ever knew.” He was a strict disciplinarian, yet fair-minded and popular among officers and enlisted alike. Offered a commission on several occasions, he is said to have declined on the grounds that he would rather be “an outstanding sergeant than just another officer.”

Daly retired on 6 February 1929 and died at Glendale, Long Island, New York, on 28 April 1937. His remains were buried at Cypress Hills National Cemetery. His record as a fighting man remains unequalled in the annals of Marine Corps history.