



Desmond T. Doss

February 7, 1919 - March 23, 2006

Desmond T. Doss, who as an unarmed Army medic saved the lives of dozens of fellow soldiers under fire on Okinawa in World War II and became the first conscientious objector to receive the Medal of Honor, died Thursday at his home in Piedmont, Ala. He was 87. His death was announced by his wife, Frances, who said he had recently been hospitalized with breathing difficulties.

Mr. Doss, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was guided all through his years by a framed poster of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer that his father bought at an auction when he was growing up in Lynchburg, Va. That poster depicted Cain holding a club with the slain Abel beneath him.

"And when I looked at that picture, I came to the Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' " Mr. Doss told Larry Smith in "Beyond Glory," an oral history of Medal of Honor winners. "I wondered, how in the world could a brother do such a thing? It put a horror in my heart of just killing, and as a result I took it personally: 'Desmond, if you love me, you won't kill.' "

When Mr. Doss was drafted in April 1942 after working in a shipyard, he was given conscientious objector status, having declined to bear arms because of his religious principles. He became a medic, the only way he could adhere to

the Sixth Commandment as well as the Fourth Commandment, to honor the Sabbath. Seventh-day Adventists consider Saturday the Sabbath, but Mr. Doss felt he could serve as a medic seven days a week since, as he put it, "Christ healed on the Sabbath."

While training at stateside posts, Private Doss faced harassment from fellow soldiers for his devotion to prayer and his refusal to handle weapons or work on the Sabbath. At one point, he recalled, an officer sought to have him discharged on the ground of mental illness.

He went overseas with the 307th Infantry, 77th Infantry Division, in the summer of 1944 and served as a combat medic on Guam and at Leyte in the Philippines, receiving the Bronze Star, before taking part in the battle for Okinawa in the spring of 1945.

Private Doss was accompanying troops in the battle for a 400-foot-high ridge on Okinawa, the Maeda Escarpment, on Saturday, May 5 -- his Sabbath -- when the Japanese counterattacked. Many of the Americans were driven off the ridge, but wounded soldiers were stranded atop it.

Private Doss remained with the wounded, and, according to his Medal of Honor citation, he refused to seek cover, carrying them, one by one, in the face of enemy fire. He lowered each man on a rope-supported litter he had devised, using double bowline knots he had learned as a youngster and tying the makeshift litter to a tree stump serving as an anchor. Every wounded man was lowered to a safe spot 35 feet below the ridgetop, and then Private Doss came down the ridge unscathed.

After engaging in additional rescue efforts under fire over the next two weeks, Private Doss was wounded by a grenade that riddled him with shrapnel. He cared for his injuries alone for five hours, rather than have another medic

emerge from cover to help him. While he was finally being carried off on a litter, he spotted a soldier who seemed worse off. He leaped off the litter, directing his aid men to help the other soldier.

Soon after that, Japanese fire hit him, and he suffered a compound arm fracture. He bound a rifle stock to his shattered arm as a splint, evidently the closest he ever came to handling a weapon, and crawled 300 yards to an aid station.

President Harry S. Truman presented him with the Medal of Honor on Oct. 12, 1945, for his actions on Okinawa. The citation credited him with saving 75 soldiers on that ridge, but he later said that the number was probably closer to 50.

Mr. Doss spent more than five years in hospitals being treated for his wounds and lost a lung to tuberculosis. Because of his infirmities, he was unable to seek steady work. He devoted himself to his religion and worked with young people in church-sponsored programs, living for many years in Rising Fawn, Ga., before moving to Alabama.

In addition to his wife, Frances, he is survived by his son, Desmond Jr., of Astoria, Ore., from his marriage to his first wife, Dorothy, who died in 1991; three stepchildren, Thomas Duman of Hixson, Tenn.; Michael Duman of Piedmont; and Marilyn Shadduck of Palm Springs, Calif.; a brother, Harold, of Kearneysville, W.Va.; nine stepgrandchildren; and five stepgreat-grandchildren.

Only one other conscientious objector has received the Medal of Honor: Cpl. Thomas W. Bennett, an Army medic in the Vietnam War who was killed in February 1969 tending to wounded soldiers in Pleiku Province.

"From a human standpoint, I shouldn't be here to tell the story," Mr. Doss told The Richmond Times-Dispatch in 1998. "All the glory should go to God. No telling how many times the Lord has spared my life."

On April 1, 1942, Desmond Doss joined the United States Army. Little did he realize that three and a half years later, he would be standing on the White House lawn, receiving the nation's highest award for his bravery and courage under fire.

Of the 16 million men in uniform during World War II, only 431 received the Congressional Medal of Honor. One of these was placed around the neck of a young Seventh-day Adventist, who during combat had not killed a single enemy soldier. In fact, he refused to carry a gun. His only weapons were his Bible and his faith in God.

President Harry S. Truman warmly shook the hand of Corporal Desmond Thomas Doss, and then held it the entire time his citation was read aloud to those gathered outside the White House on October 12, 1945. "I'm proud of you," Truman said. "You really deserve this. I consider this a greater honor than being president."

The journey that had brought young Desmond to this day had been a challenging one. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, he was working at the Newport News Naval shipyard and could have requested a deferment—but he wanted to do more for his country. He was willing to risk his life on the front lines in order to preserve freedom.

When he joined the Army, Desmond assumed that his classification as a conscientious objector would not require him to carry a weapon. He wanted to be an Army combat medic. As luck would have it, he was assigned to an

infantry rifle company. His refusal to carry a gun caused a lot of trouble among his fellow soldiers. They viewed him with disdain and called him a misfit. One man in the barracks warned him, "Doss, as soon as we get into combat, I'll make sure you won't come back alive."

His commanding officers also wanted to get rid of the skinny Virginian who spoke with a gentle southern drawl. They saw him as a liability. Nobody believed a soldier without a weapon was worthwhile. They tried to intimidate him, scold him, assign him extra tough duties, and declared him mentally unfit for the Army. Then they attempted to court martial him for refusing a direct order—to carry a gun. But they failed to find a way to toss him out, and he refused to leave. He believed his duty was to obey God and serve his country. But it had to be in that order. His unwavering convictions were most important.

Desmond had been raised with a fervent belief in the Bible. When it came to the Ten Commandments, he applied them personally. During childhood his father had purchased a large framed picture at an auction. It portrayed the Ten Commandments with colorful illustrations. Next to the words, "Thou shalt not kill" was a drawing of Cain holding a club and standing over the body of his dead brother Abel. Little Desmond would look at that picture and ask, "Why did Cain kill Abel? How in the world could a brother do such a thing?" In Desmond's mind, God said, "If you love me, you won't kill." With that picture firmly embedded in his mind, he determined that he would never take life.

However, there was another commandment that Desmond took just as seriously as the sixth. It was the fourth commandment. His religious upbringing included weekly church attendance, on the seventh day. The Army was exasperated to discover that he had yet another personal requirement. He asked for a weekly pass so he could attend church every Saturday. This meant two strikes against him. His fellow soldiers saw this Bible reading puritan, as being totally out of sync with the rest of the Army. So they

ostracized him, bullied him, called him awful names, and cursed at him. His commanding officers also made his life difficult.

Things began turning around when the men discovered that this quiet unassuming medic had a way to heal the blisters on their march-weary feet. And if someone fainted from heat stroke, this medic was at his side, offering his own canteen. Desmond never held a grudge. With kindness and gentle courtesy, he treated those who had mistreated him. He lived the golden rule, "...do to others what you would have them do to you..." (Matthew 7:12 NIV).

Desmond served in combat on the islands of Guam, Leyte, and Okinawa. In each military operation he exhibited extraordinary dedication to his fellow men. While others were taking life, he was busy saving life. When the cry, "medic" rang out on the battlefield, he never considered his own safety. He repeatedly ran into the heat of battle to treat a fallen comrade and carry him back to safety. All this, while enemy bullets whizzed past and mortar shells exploded around him. Several times, while treating a wounded soldier, Desmond was so close to enemy lines, he could hear the whispering of Japanese voices.

In May, 1945, as German troops were surrendering on the other side of the world, Japanese troops were fiercely defending, to their last man, the only remaining barrier (Okinawa and the Maeda Escarpment) to an allied invasion of their homeland. The men in Desmond's division were repeatedly trying to capture the Maeda Escarpment, an imposing rock face the soldiers called Hacksaw Ridge. After the company had secured the top of the cliff, the Americans were stunned when suddenly enemy forces rushed them in a vicious counterattack. Officers ordered an immediate retreat. Soldiers rushed to climb back down the steep cliff. All the soldiers except one. Less than one third of the men made it back down. The rest lay wounded, scattered across enemy soil—abandoned and left for dead, if they weren't

already. One lone soldier disobeyed orders and charged back into the firefight to rescue as many of his men as he could, before he either collapsed or died trying. His iron determination and unflagging courage resulted in at least 75 lives saved that day, May 5, 1945, his Sabbath.

Eventually, the Americans took Hacksaw Ridge. Okinawa was captured inch by bloody inch. Several days later, during an unsuccessful night raid, Desmond was severely wounded. Hiding in a shell hole with two riflemen, a Japanese grenade landed at his feet. The explosion sent him flying. The shrapnel tore into his leg and up to his hip. He treated his own wounds as best he could. While attempting to reach safety, he was hit by a sniper's bullet that shattered his arm. His brave actions as a combat medic were done. But not before insisting that his litter-bearers take another man first before rescuing him. Wounded, in pain, and losing blood, he still put others ahead of his own safety. He would choose to die so another could live. After all, that's what he read in his Bible. Such was the character demonstrated by Jesus Christ.

In addition to his Medal of Honor, Desmond Doss received a Bronze Star for valor with one Oak Leaf cluster (signifying he received 2 Bronze Stars); a Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf clusters (signifying he received 3 Purple Hearts); the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three Bronze Stars, and beachhead arrowhead (signifying he served in 4 combat campaigns including an amphibious landing under combat conditions); the Good Conduct Medal; the American Defense Campaign; and the not so common, Presidential Unit Citation given to the 1st Battalion, 307Inf, 77th Infantry Division for securing the Maeda Escarpment.

The Medal of Honor was established during the Civil War under President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. At the one hundredth anniversary in 1962, the other recipients of that award selected Desmond Doss to represent them at a White

House ceremony. He had a pleasant chat with President John F. Kennedy.

Before being discharged from the Army in 1946, Desmond developed tuberculosis. He would spend most of the next six years in hospitals. Cold, wet, sleepless nights, shivering in a muddy foxhole on the islands of the Pacific, had taken their toll. As the illness progressed his left lung had to be surgically removed along with five ribs. For the rest of his life, he survived on a single lung, until it too failed. At the age of 87, Corporal Desmond Thomas Doss died on March 23, 2006, after being hospitalized with difficulty breathing. He is buried in the National Cemetery, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Other Links to watch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5l15k-ZsFZs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euUaiS0hj1k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCKhwpN0EQ4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5JVQt-C8YE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfRq-JeUCSM>

Tribute Wall



“ *Reflecting on Memories created a Tribute Video in memory of Desmond T. Doss*



Reflecting on Memories - October 22, 2016 at 01:16 AM

JD

“ *Muy buenos días, mi nombre es Juan, soy de Perú, dedo decir que hace 5 años conocí la historia de vocacion y servicio a Dios de Desmond Doss, pues mas que ser heroe y valiente en la guerra fue la verdadera fe que mantuvo en una linea de fuego que dificilmente podria alguien salir vivo, esta fe que le puso un escudo y lo protegio mientras salvaba a sus compañeros, sin duda alguna una mision que Dios le atribuyo y que desempeño con amor a la vida. Gracias Doss por motrarnos que siempre hay fe, eres el claro ejemplo de que Dios no elije a los preparados, prepara a los elegidos.*

Juan José Bueno Diaz - January 19, 2025 at 02:45 PM

AL

“ Dear Doss family, I am a teenage boy from North Dakota. 4 years ago i started reading books about Desmond. Since then i have looked up to him. as a friend and as a hero. Desmond was a great man, and he is looking down on us now. I am willing to bet that he is the reason we won the battle of hacksaw ridge. if i ever go to Tennessee the first thing im going to do is visit his grave and give him a letter i have wrote him. i really hope you guys have a wonderful and happy life. Thank you so much Desmond. See you when i get there! and I promise to make you proud.



-Alexander Kania

Alexander - December 18, 2024 at 02:36 PM

SZ

“ *The Doss family it's been a few years since the passing of Desmond you have my sympathy I never meet Desmond but I got the chance to know him from the movie Hacksaw Ridge which I've watched at least a dozen times I'd take Desmond to be on my side any day min. Sec of the day week month year what a brave soldier I cannot believe his faith courage stamina drive to be the best medic he could and putting his life on the line without carrying a weapon amazing man I wish I had the chance to had to meet him what a story I don't know if I could of done what Desmond did I just can't get over his dedication when everyone wanted him gone,I'm listening to The Conscientious Objector as I'm writing this obituary,this is first time I've watched this,but I'll watch this many times over as I'm watching those brave men amazing what they did maybe I'll get a chance to meet him in the next life to THANK HIM for his service for our FREEDOMS we have today,,but seems like the govt forgot about these brave men who fought and gave their lives,and today this govt doesn't seem to care,because they where not there and this makes me very angry,I'm privilaged to send this condolence and message to Desmond and the Doss family THANK YOU SO MUCH GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU*

Steven Zatkan - July 16, 2023 at 09:33 PM

 David
MacGregor

“ *Bravo Zulu, Desmond, way to go, setting the best and highest example for others to aspire to.*

David MacGregor - November 21, 2022 at 08:41 AM

LP

“ We are thinking about purchasing the home stead in Lynchburg Virginia Since served our country Any way we can continue his memorial onward Would be deeply appreciated
Pray cherish memories I'm bring up now



Larry and Heidi Parker - July 09, 2021 at 08:38 PM

MM

“ Mr. Doss is a hero and humanitarian that stood for his rights no matter what. I just saw the movie about him and was forever moved about all the pain and suffering he went through. I wish more people including myself could like him, it would be a better world to live in. God bless him and his family.

Michael Mongillo - January 13, 2020 at 01:22 AM

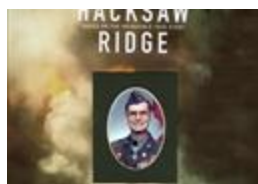
PH

We agree. We just saw the movie, too. There are not enough men like him.

Pete and Linda Holmes - January 27, 2020 at 05:52 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Reflecting on Memories - November 18, 2016 at 01:03 PM



“ 8 files added to the album Memories Album



Reflecting on Memories - October 22, 2016 at 01:16 AM