

HISTORY OF THE DEVIL DOGS
FROM 1918
UNTIL TODAY'S
MILITARY ORDER DEVIL DOGS

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HISTORY OF THE DEVIL DOGS

As members of the Military Order of Devil Dogs, perhaps many of us know little to nothing about what happened in June in the year 1918. What happened over the following days, brought the United States Marine Corps to the forefront as an elite fighting force for the first time as well as a demonstration of military fire-power that was viewed by all nations.

Just before 5 P.M. on June 6, 1918 three companies of Marines led by Major, Benjamin S. Berry approached Belleau Woods, with lines of steel helmeted Marines with fixed bayonets. Their quest was a mile square hunting preserve, with its dense underbrush, huge boulders and trees. It made great cover for the game and birds along with the German machine guns and their gray-uniformed crack troops, considered at that time, as the "Worlds Finest."

As the attack started at 5P.M. forty-four year old First Sgt. Dan Daly, recipient already of two Medals of Honor, crouched with his men of the 73rd Machine Gun Company in a wooded grove at the edge of the wheat field.

Floyd Gibbons a war correspondent described in the Chicago Tribune what he observed. The bullets nipped the tops of the wheat and ripped the bark from the trees, three feet from the ground, on which the Marines lay. An old Gunnery Sgt. commanded the platoon in the absence of the lieutenant who had been shot and was out of this fight. This old Sgt. was a Marine veteran, and his cheeks were bronzed with the wind and the sun of the seven seas. The service bar across his left breast showed that he had fought in the Philippines, in Santo Domingo, at the walls of Peking and in the streets of Vera Cruz . . .

As the minute for the advance arrived, he arose from the trees first. He jumped out onto the exposed edge of the field that ran hot with lead. The field where the Sgt. and his men were about to charge across. Then he turned to give the charge orders to the men of his platoon, his mates, the men he loved. He said, "Come on you sons-of-bitches, do you want to live forever?" (*1)

Those first waves were severely slaughtered. Most of the Marines who survived were pinned down in the wheat field, and after dark crawled back to the safety of the edge of the original Marine line.

In the advance, Major Berry was severely wounded in the left forearm and correspondent Floyd Gibbons trying to help the Major took three bullets. Gibbons sent to Paris a dispatch reporting that the Marines were entering combat. The censor hearing that the reporter was wounded and apparently killed in action, passed the story unchanged. Though against the rules to identify units in combat, the censor's sentimentality allowed the world to know that the Marine Corps was in action at Belleau Wood.

WITH THAT FLUKE CAME GLORY.

(2)

On Berry's right, the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines moved out under Major Berton W. Sibley. His young lieutenants shouted, "follow me!" And the Marines swept across the fields in four waves at right dress into the Southern end of Belleau Wood. The Germans aimed low, shooting the Marines in the legs. A 49 year-old Colonel Albertus W. Catlin watched on proudly from a rise, until a snipers bullet sent the former Marine and Medal of Honor recipient at Vera Cruz home after an eight hour ambulance ride to Paris.

Several Marine units reached the woods and 2nd Lt. Louis F. Timmerman Jr. led his platoon straight through the mile-wide woods without any major incident, but when exiting were the target of fire from every side. They charged back into the woods and captured two machine guns. They once more charged out of the woods and were decimated. Though Lt Timmerman was shot in the face, he pulled his six surviving men of his platoon back into the shelter of the woods. Joined by small groups of other Marines he soon commanded 40 Marines. They manned the two captured machine guns and held the captured ground. Timmerman was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions.

Major Thomas Holcomb's 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines faced a relentless Enemy barrage and in 40 minutes, Lt. Graves Erskine's platoon of 58 Marines were reduced to 5. Then the lieutenant sent a wounded Marine to get help and to say they were unable to advance. He returned an hour later and reported that the Captain said, "Goddammit, continue the advance." **THEY DID.** (*2)

Holcomb's 96th Company stormed the village of Bouresches at the southeast corner of the woods. Lt. Clifton B. Cates, the 4th platoon commander had been momentarily knocked out by a bullet, upon recovering his senses and with an abandoned French rifle led his men into the town. It became a bitter street fight. Twenty-three Marines held the town for an hour, before other Marines arrived.

The 6th Marines command post had word that the Marines in Bouresches were low on ammunition. Two Marines volunteered to take a truck loaded with ammo into Brouresches on the shell-pocked road. Through shelling and on a slippery road and with a broken wheel, they finally reached the desperate Marines and delivered the ammo. Those two Marines 2nd Lt. William Moore and 48-year old Sgt./Maj. John H. Quick were both awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Navy Cross.

In the darkness of the night an impending storm, units became disorganized and several times Marines fired on their own comrades. Major Sibley's Marines lay on their stomachs, the flank of their line entirely unprotected. Yet Sibley had no intention of withdrawing.

(3)

All through that long night, many of the wounded lay as they had fallen. On that first day of the battle for Belleau Wood 31 officers and 1,056 men of the Marine Brigade became casualties but they had their foothold in Belleau Wood and a legend of the Corps was having its birth.

Now let us take one step back and see what led up to this day. Though the Marines were in the so called "Brush Wars" of Haiti and the Dominican Republic; to enter France was a totally new dimension for the United States Marine Corps. The world-wide, wholesale slaughter of World War I started with the Marine Corps at 511 officers and 13,214 enlisted men.

On June 14, 1917, saw 2,759 Marines of the 5th Marine Regiment sail in naval transports to circumvent a reluctant Secretary of War. Most Marines saw their duties as to support the Navy, but Commandant George Barnett insisted that the Marine Corps was a Force-In-Readiness, able to share the Western Front with the Army.

A week after the sinking of the Lusitania by a German submarine in May 1915, Col. John A LeJeune, then Assistant to the Commandant said, "That if the United States were to fight a naval power, the Marine Corps would defend advanced naval bases; but if it faced a non-naval power the Corps would be the advance guard of the Army. . .First to set foot on hostile soil in order to seize, fortify and hold a port from which as a base, the Army could prosecute its campaign."

Once the United States declared, Commandant Barnett pushed for a Marine combat role and said, "I don't want the Marine Corps to be considered a police force." (*3) There were two disputes that raged openly, between Pershing and the Marines. He used the Marines in communications and military police assignments and they had to fight for combat assignments. But by the wars end the Corps fought under the slogan, "First To Fight." (*4)

We must now examine the conditions Marines were forced to fight under. Something that the Marines in World War II and Korea would once again experience. Outmoded and shortages of weapons. There weren't any mortars or grenades available. The types of weapons that were sorely needed, when fighting in trench warfare. Otherwise it was and would be a hand-to-hand combat situation. Now let us go back to Belleau Wood.

Before the attack by the Marines on Belleau Wood had began; the French intelligence had told the Marines that Germans had vacated Belleau Wood. The Marines never checked on it by sending out scouting patrols, in case the French were wrong. The Germans were there a regiment strong. It was the hard-nosed tip of their push towards Paris.

(4)

On that morning of June 6th Gunnery Sgt. Ernest A. Janon of the 49th Company spotted 12 Germans with automatic rifles crawling towards the Marine lines. He yelled a warning and then killed the first two Germans with his bayonet. He had saved the Company. The 39 year old Sgt. who served under the name of Charles Hoffman was the 1st Marine in World War I to win the Medal of Honor and first Devil Dog so decorated.

As June 7th began with the battlefield littered with dead and wounded. An advance by the Marines was stopped, as the German's defense was too strong. Artillery barrages continued on into the 8th and 9th of June.

The days of the 10th through the 14th found the Marines in bitter hand-to-hand combat. Then on the morning of the 15th, Capt. Roswell Winans a Medal of Honor recipient from the Dominican Republic gained a foothold on the western side of the woods. His unit was relieved later that night and the bearded and exhausted Marines went to the rear. In two weeks of battle the Marines had taken more than 50 percent casualties.

The Army's 7th Infantry untried in battle, who replaced the Marines, were unable to move the Germans from the woods. The 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines was brought back to clean the Germans out of the woods but it too was badly mangled. The Marine Brigade took over the front again. On June 25th at 5 P.M. after an all day barrage the Marines began moving through the woods and the Germans out of reinforcements began pulling back.

On June 26th at 7 A.M. Capt. Robert Yowell's 16th Company reached the Northern edge of Belleau Wood and the Battalion Commander sent this message, .

“WOODS NOW U.S. MARINE CORPS ENTIRELY.” (*5)

The French Parliament declared July 4 a National Holiday in Honor of the Americans fighting on French soil. A gigantic parade was set in Paris and the 2nd Division sent a Battalion of hand picked old hands to go to the rose-strewn welcome in the Capitol. There the Marine Corps Flag was hailed by the cry and cheers of, “VIVE LES MARINES!”

After a night of celebration the Marines headed back to the front. The French Commanding General of the 6th Army ordered that henceforth the Bois de Belleau would be called the “Bois de la Brigade de Marine.” (*6)

Yet the price had been high, 126 Officers and 5,057 enlisted men of the Marine Brigade dead and wounded. That included 1,062 battle deaths.

(5)

The survivors could never forget Gunnery Sgt. Don V. Paradis of Detroit who later wrote his family this letter. "I was knocked down by shell concussion and caught in machine gunfire several times but managed to pull through safely. We were in the front lines for sixteen days without any relief and when we did go back it was only into reserve for six days before we came back into the lines again. I am the only Sgt. left in our 1st Platoon, that is of the old bunch. Of course we have all new ones now. We are getting a little real rest and a chance to clean up, which means a whole lot, as all of us had cooties and had not had a chance to get a real bath. For a month and four days we did not have our clothes off. Not even our shoes, only to rub our feet and perhaps wash them with a canteen of water." (*7)

General Pershing wrote the 2nd Division; "You stood like a wall against the enemy advance on Paris." (*8)

But the battle had an unhappy aftermath, as a rivalry broke out between the Marines and the soldiers of the Division. The Army smarted under the new found glory. . .and publicity. . . won by the Marine Brigade.

The bitterness simmered for a generation and is the given reason for keeping the Marines out of Europe in World War II. The fortunes of war placed the Marines at Belleau Wood, shoved them into battle where they stopped the Germans and drove them out of Belleau Wood.

It was the Marine Corps biggest moment and they grabbed it. They would fight again but henceforth the name United States Marine Corps would be known around the world.

Now let us get to the name Devil Dog. Why and how it was tacked on the Marine Brigade at Belleau Wood.

Remember I told you earlier how the Marines were under supplied with Grenades, mortars and etc.,? This came into play in the tenacity that the Marines displayed at Belleau Wood. In the hand-to-hand combat the Marines were said, "To have actually bitten their German adversaries noses in the heat of battle. Thusly they bit Like a dog and the Germans responded by calling them Tefelhunde. . . (*9)

DEVIL DOG

Now perhaps you can better understand what the name Devil Dog stands for. Honor, there was no fun at Belleau Wood. The name Devil Dog was earned at the cost of 1,062 Marines who gave their all. We may not have the right to use the title Devil Dog as it something sacred and was earned by Marines in 1918. But since we do we should bring no shame upon it. We all at one time have been accorded the privilege of being called Marine. We must never lose sight that to be also accorded the title Devil Dog, was earned many years ago, in 1918. And is a distinct honor.

(6)

You have just read a thumbnail report of where the Devil Dogs were born. But what those hard-nosed Marines left us, we must never, ever tarnish. We must honor that tradition, by building on it,

DEVIL DOG. . . A NAME OF HONOR, PRIDE, VALOR AND TRADITION .

Credits of content listed below

- *1. Floyd Gibbons, *And They thought We Wouldn't Fight*, George Doran Co. 1918
- *2. Robert B. Aspree, *At Belleau Wood*, G. Putnam's Sons 1965
- *3. Jack Shulimson, "The First To Fight" undated manuscript 1914-1918 (quoted lecture)
- *4. " " " " " " " " " " " "
- *5. Robert B. Aspree, *At Belleau Wood*, G. Putnam's sons (Pg. 307)
- *6. Harbord, *The American Army in France, 1917-1919*, (Pg. 298)
- *7. Don V Pardis, *Memoirs of Don Pardis . . . The U.S. Marine Corps History*,
by: J Robert Moskin
- *8. Floyd Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight*, (Pg. 299)
- 9. As told by an original Devil Dog Marine Stanley Jekonski,* who was there.
(As he related to Pound 96 members while he was at the Vineland Veteran's home before his death) * AKA, Cpl. Stanley J. Wilkinson, Honorary Pedigree Devil Dog #HHD14

DEVIL DOG CREED

I am an American I was born in France. I have held the title of United States Marine, and understand the commitment of holding the title, Devil Dog. It is a tradition born at Belleau Wood in the year 1918, of a force in readiness and the first to fight. As a Devil Dog, I ask no quarter and give no quarter. I will do everything in my power to uphold the objectives of the Military Order of Devil Dogs and to carry out my duties and to a swift and satisfactory completion.

Written By: PDD George E. Williams, 1989

**BELOW FROM "THE LEGATION GUARD NEWS," PEKING, CHINA (1930)
FROM THE MILITARY JOURNAL, THE 4TH MARINES AND SOOCHOW CREEK
A lost third Stanza (about Devil Dogs) now missing from the Marine Corps Hymn**

**When we were called across the sea to stand for home and right,
With the spirit of the brave and free, we fought with all our might;
When we helped to stem the German drive, they say we fought like fiends,
And the French rechristened Belleau Woods for the United States Marines.**

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