

Desmond Thomas Doss

The Soldier without a Gun

It would be looked upon as weird, wimpy, or disrespectful if a soldier refused to carry a gun. Despite the imminent threat of ridicule and torment, Desmond Doss did exactly that. His heroic feats would inspire his company as he braved the fire to rescue his comrades. He would be hailed as a hero by his platoon, and later, the world.

Growing up in Lynchburg, Virginia, the slightly built Desmond was working in a shipyard, a job which granted him the option of not enlisting in an American armed service (a deferment). He did not, however, accept this privilege and enlisted in the Army on the 1st of April, 1942, as an unarmed medic. Being a Seventh Day Adventist, he was forbidden to take a human life. He wouldn't carry a gun or even eat meat because it would mean slaughtering one of God's creatures. The resentment of him and his beliefs were widespread through his platoon.

His commanding officers tried many times to get him kicked out, including declaring him mentally ill and unstable. At a hearing where he was getting tried for a dishonourable discharge he countered by saying this, "I want to serve my country, even though I refuse to kill. I've performed all of my other duties with dedication and I've been an exemplary soldier in every other way. I love my country - a country that prides itself on religious freedom. Isn't that one of the reasons we are at war - to protect our freedoms? Yet you want to give me a dishonourable discharge by claiming I'm mentally unstable for no other reason than I am practising my religion? I'm sorry, gentlemen, but that is flat out wrong and un - American, and you know it."¹. The jury could not prove him wrong and let him stay.

He was shipped out to the South Pacific in 1944 where he showed excellence and was awarded a Bronze Star, as well as the respect of his comrades, for several other heroic feats on this detachment. One would think that this would be his most heroic feat, but it was not. On the island of Okinawa he would prove that he belonged in the Army, not because he fitted in, but because he stood out.

In May 1945, Desmond's platoon was assigned the challenge of capturing the Maeda Escarpment, a rocky cliff on Okinawa that the soldiers had nicknamed "Hacksaw Ridge". When the Americans secured the top of the cliff, the Japanese launched a fierce counterattack and the platoon were ordered to go into full retreat. As a hundred or so men lay atop the cliff, groaning or screaming in pain, one soldier disobeyed these orders and stayed at the top; it was Desmond. Painstakingly, he crawled over to the first man, treated him, and dragged him to the top of the cliff. There he fashioned a

slung out of a rope and lowered the wounded soldier down the 50 foot cliff. He repeated this feat over and over again, praying and saying to God, "Just let me get one more man". He said, in a later interview, that he was determined to keep rescuing his men until he succeeded, collapsed, or died trying.² By nighttime, with his grit, commitment, and perseverance, he had successfully treated and lowered at least 75 men from the top of the Escarpment. With hands that had been rubbed raw, he climbed down the cargo net to a round of cheers and applause from the men who had once mocked him.

On May 5, 1945, Desmond Doss saved 75 men, who'd teased him, bullied him, and mocked him. Despite all of this, he was committed to saving them, risking his life in the process. For this, he would become the first conscientious objector to get the Medal of Honour.

Desmond Doss was a war hero without a gun. Regardless of the tormenting he was brave and forgiving, and bore no anger towards the people who teased him. He proved that a soldier did not have to carry a gun to make a difference in a war, that kind-heartedness, compassion, and forgiveness overpowers anger, violence, and aggression. It is brave and admirable to have the willpower to stick to your religion in a time when you are expected to do something against your beliefs. Desmond Doss was a true hero.

References

<https://www.adventist.org/people/religious-liberty/desmond-doss/>
<https://myhero.com/desmond-doss>

1.Zullo, Ten True Tales, ND

2.Zullo, Ten True Tales, ND