

Irish American Veterans

On St. Patrick's Day, while listening to Irish music, I wondered how many Irish American soldiers served with exceptional honor in our military. After some research, here is what I found. Since the Irish are not native to our country, they are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

One of the most recognizable names from the Revolutionary War was Francis Marion, also known as The Swamp Fox. He was the leader of the South Carolina militia and for two years launched guerrilla attacks against the British. John Barry, son of a poor Irish farmer rose from cabin boy to senior commander of the US fleet and is known as the founder of the US Navy.

During the Civil War, two brigades with Irish soldiers were significant to the North, the Fighting 69th of New York and the 69th Pennsylvania. Both were formed by Irish immigrants with the Pennsylvania also having a number of Jewish soldiers. The New York brigades was known as the Fighting Irish while the Pennsylvania was originally called Paddies un Uniform. Both distinguished themselves doing the war. Since Ireland has fought against the rule of the British, some of the Irish felt sympathy with the South, including a number who fought with the Charleston Irish Volunteers.

Henry Hogan was a sergeant in the Army during the Indian Wars and one of only 19 to receive the Medal of Honor twice. Hogan was born in County Clare, Ireland. He served under General Miles in Montana.

During WWI, William "Wild Bill" Donovan earned the Medal of Honor along with many other decorations from the US and other countries. After performing a rescue under fire, he was offered the Croix-de-Guerre, but turned it down because a Jewish soldier who had taken part in the rescue had not also been awarded the honor. When this insult was corrected, Donovan accepted the distinction. He continued his service to the county as the WWII head of the Office of Strategic Services, later known as the CIA. Donovan was born to American-born children of Irish immigrants.

Audie Murphy was born in Kingston, Texas, the son of share-cropping parents of Irish descent. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, he tried to enlist but was too young. His sister provided an affidavit that falsified his birth date by one year. Murphy went to be the most decorated soldier in World War II and earned over 30 medals including the Medal of Honor. As most of us know, after his service, he became a movie star. Murphy starred as himself in the movie To Hell and Back. It was reported that he slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow.

Thomas Hudner Jr, earned the Medal of Honor during the Korean War while attempting to save his fellow airman in the snowy mountains of Korea. He stayed in the Navy and served as the Executive Office of the USS Kitty Hawk during the Vietnam War. His father was a Massachusetts businessman of Irish descent.