

John J. Kelly – Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge

BLUF: Private John Joseph Kelly was a United States Marine awarded the Army and Navy Medals of Honor. Kelly was attached to the 78th Company, 6th Regiment, 2nd Army Division, at the Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge on 3 October 1918. On that day, Kelly advanced through an Allied barrage to take out a German machine gun nest. In addition to the Medal of Honor, Kelly received the Navy Cross, the Silver Star, and a Wound Stripe (Purple Heart) for his efforts. He left the Marine Corps in 1919, returning to his hometown of Chicago, Illinois. Kelly died in 1957 as the last surviving double Medal of Honor World War I recipient.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS DISPLAYED: Justice, Judgment, **Dependability, Initiative, Decisiveness**, Tact, Integrity, Endurance, **Bearing**, Unselfishness, **Courage**, Knowledge, Loyalty, and **Enthusiasm**.

SETTING THE STAGE: John J. Kelly was born on 24 June 1898 in Chicago, Illinois. The oldest son of Tim and Elizabeth Kelly. He grew up on the streets of Chicago without finishing high school. Working as a common laborer, Kelly was arrested several times by Chicago authorities before 1917. He enlisted in the Marine Corps as a private on 15 May 1917 at the USMC Recruiting Office in Port Royal, SC. Assigned to MCB Port Royal for training, Kelly graduated in August 1917, joining the 7th Company, 6th Marine Regiment, on 5 September. On 12 September, while at MCB Quantico, VA, Kelly was transferred to the 78th Army Infantry Company as part of the American Expeditionary Force. The 78th Company moved to Philadelphia at the end of 1917, departing for France aboard the *USS Henderson* on 19 January 1918. Kelly arrived at St. Nazaire, France, on 5 February 1918.

THE STORY: Upon Kelly's arrival in France, he and his fellow Marines began training with the French Army. This assignment was typical in the early months of America's participation in World War I. It was not until mid-1918 that the U.S. troops fought as independent units.

The first engagement for Kelly and the AEF was at Château-Thierry. As part of the second Battle of the Marne, the engagement was a portion of the German Spring Offensive. Though the offensive began in May 1918, the AEF did not enter the fight until 18 July 1918. The AEF counter-offensive action lasted until 22 July. With the efforts of the AEF at Belleau Wood in June 1918 and Château-Thierry in July 1918, the Germans retreated to the other side of the Marne River. Kelly participated in the Battle of St. Mihiel from 12 to 15 September 1918. At the end of September, the last major Allied push began as the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

The Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge began on 3 October 1918 near the border of Belgium and Luxembourg. On the first day of battle, Kelly's platoon was pinned down by heavy German machine gunfire. An artillery barrage was ordered to clear the area in front of the Allied lines. As the barrage began, Kelly ran 100 yards straight for a German machine gun nest, tossing a grenade into the nest, killing the Germans. With the barrage continuing, which kept the Germans under cover, Kelly pulled out his pistol, killing the Germans in the next machine gun emplacement. When Kelly returned to the American lines through the last of the barrage, he brought eight German prisoners at the point of his gun. He was also suffering from a gunshot wound to the right thigh. The Americans advanced toward St. Etienne by the end of October, which turned the battle's tide. On 28 October, the Germans retreated out of the area, which they had held since 1915.

Kelly and his unit continued the offensive until the armistice on 11 November 1918. The 78th Company marched into Germany, taking and occupying the Koblenz Bridgehead until 12 December 1918. Kelly returned to the U.S. in March

1919. At his request, due to his wounds, Kelly was discharged from service on 14 August 1919. He received an "Excellent" service rating upon his release. Kelly left the Marine Corps at the same rank that he entered, that of a private. He was not recommended for promotion by the Army, and there was no follow-up by the Marine Corps. For his actions at Blanc Mont, Kelly was awarded the Army Medal of Honor by General John J. Pershing on 22 January 1919.

AFTERMATH: With the war over and Kelly out of the Marine Corps, he returned to Chicago. Working many odd jobs during his life, Kelly remained in Chicago. When World War II began, Kelly applied for the draft in February 1943. He was listed as unfit for duty and never drafted. Kelly passed away in Chicago at age 59 on 20 November 1957. In addition to the Army and Navy Medals of Honor, Kelly was awarded the Silver Star with four oak clusters, the Purple Heart with one oak cluster, the French Médaille Militaire, the French Croix de Guerre, the Montenegro Medal for Bravery, and the Italian Croce al Merito di Guerra. During World War I, Kelly received five of the highest military awards for his efforts in France from four different countries.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the leadership trait of "decisiveness" best fit John Kelly's actions in France, and why?
2. How did the actions of Kelly affect his fellow Marines? The enemy? Future Marines?
3. What lessons can one take from Kelly's conduct of the battle?

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