



2019 Veterans Day Essay Contest Middle School Honorable Mention: Clarke Canova

Desmond Thomas Doss: A True American Patriot

One of the bravest soldiers who has ever served in the United States Military never fired one shot while in battle. Despite being a conscientious objector, Desmond Thomas Doss, a Virginian, joined the United States Army during World War II. Because of his convictions as a devout Seventh Day Adventist, he refused to carry a gun onto the battlefield. However, Doss was still able to valiantly defend the men who fought beside him. This inspiring American patriot reminds us what we could accomplish if we remain faithful to our beliefs when facing the enemy in battle.

Like many others, Doss felt the need to fulfill his duty of volunteering in support of his country after the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941. At the time, he was working for the shipyard in Newport News, Virginia. Even though he could have taken a deferment, Doss enlisted in the United States Army as a combat medic on April 1, 1942.

Ironically, a miscommunication led to Doss being assigned to a rifle company at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. While there, he was beat up, taunted as a coward, and even received death threats! Even so, Doss remained resolute in strictly following the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Terry Benedict, who made a documentary titled *The Conscientious Objector*, explains that "They made his life hell. It started out as harassment, then it became abusive." Benedict also tells how a platoon leader tried to make it inevitable for Doss to give up and drop out with all his excessive demands. He was even court martialed for disobeying a direct order to carry a gun. However, Doss was vindicated when it was presented during his hearing that a law passed in 1940 made it possible for any soldier to help in the war effort in a non-combatant way.

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After returning to his platoon, Doss requested a pass that would allow him to attend church on Saturdays. In hopes that Doss would ultimately give up and leave, his commanding officer denied the request. Instead, Doss persevered and finally earned the respect of his fellow soldiers when he helped one of his platoon members who had fallen behind during a hike and offered him his canteen. Why did Doss give this man water when he, as well as the others, was so despicable towards him? His Christian faith taught him to always live by the golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

In March of 1944, Doss and the 77th Infantry Division arrived at Guam where intense combat occurred for three months. They quickly realized that the Japanese would specifically target medics in order to cause more deaths to ultimately occur. “Them boys fired them machines guns and things ‘til the barrels was turning red,” recalls radio operator V. L. Starling in the Doss documentary *The Conscientious Objector*. Starling remembers Doss saying, “Them guys that’s wounded out there, I gotta go see about them. That’s my job.” “If they wasn’t dead he’d take care of them and drag them back,” adds Starling. “I don’t know how he kept from getting shot by the enemy.”

Doss ultimately survived the Japanese campaign and would later be awarded The Bronze Star for his heroic actions in Guam and the Philippines. Even after Guam, Doss and his Division was sent to Leyte, where combat was just as fierce as Guam.

In May of 1945, Doss and his comrades would face their toughest challenge yet: the Maeda Escarpment, nicknamed “Hacksaw Ridge.” During this battle, Doss helped the wounded while being wounded himself. Exhausted with battle fatigue, the Americans attempted to get much-needed sleep one night. The Japanese, however, counter-attacked, leaving the officers no choice but to order an immediate retreat below the ridge. Doss, however, decided to stay



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under the cover of darkness and help all wounded soldiers who believed they were as good as dead. One by one Doss carried each man to the edge of “Hacksaw Ridge” and used a rope to single-handedly lower them to his waiting Division below. After lowering each man, Doss would pray, “Please God help me get one more.” Amazingly, he saved seventy-five men throughout the night without being killed!

Because of his actions, Doss was promoted to Corporal and awarded the Medal of Honor, the only soldier to ever receive this honor without firing one shot. The story of Desmond Doss is truly inspiring and teaches us that to win in battle does not mean you have to use a weapon.

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