

Threw Himself on a Live Grenade

by Larry James Pellet



Duane Dewey receiving the Medal of Honor from President Eisenhower

There are heroes in life, and then there are men like Duane Dewey. Bravely fighting for his country in a “forgotten” Korean war, though chivalry and patriotism were at their peak, Marine Corporal Dewey –get this- threw himself on a live grenade to save the lives of the men around him.

Can you imagine.

A machine gunner, Dewey was stationed above the perilous 38th Parallel. Already injured and already shot, he spotted a grenade tossed his way by Chinese forces greatly outnumbering his 1st Marine Division on April 16 1952, and smothered the exploding devise. The absorption from the blow preserved the lives around him while the blast lifted him and a fellow corpsman 5 feet into the air.

One of only two men from Muskegon to have ever won the Medal of Honor, and the first to receive such accolades from President Eisenhower, Dewey died recently on Oct 11, 2021 in St. Augustine Florida from a series of medical conditions. Honored in Fruitport in 2011 at the newly renovated Veterans Memorial Park with a plaque, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and a fly-over by bomber-type WWII aircraft, Dewey remained humble his whole life, saying “You do what you have to do...don’t stop to think about it”. Ceremony organizer and Fruitport historian Jerry Alger remembers him as a “fabulous guy”.

Eisenhower, a military giant in his own right, described Dewey as having a “body of steel”.

Dewey’s medal reads, “For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a gunner in a machine gun platoon of Company E, in action against enemy aggressor forces. His indomitable courage, outstanding initiative, and valiant efforts in behalf of others in the fact of almost certain death reflect the highest credit upon Cpl. Dewey and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service”.

Immediately after his heroic deed, Dewey proclaimed, “I don’t think I can take much more of this”, and was taken to a trench filled with other wounded Americans. The soldier was given a shot of morphine, and even while facing the uncertainty of death, expressed concern about his fellow troops. Dewey subsequently spent 5 months convalescing.



Dewey with his wife Bertha

“Not everybody survives a grenade blast”, noted his daughter Arline Broome. “Some do...”

Born in Grand Rapids in 1931 into a poor, government funded home, Dewey attended Muskegon High School until 1947. Only 3 other recipients of the Medal of Honor from the Korean War still survive.

When he got hit with that grenade, his first thought was to think of his daughter,” said fellow friend and Marine Don Sherry. It’s one reason why Sherry said Dewey survived the blast after emergency surgery and months of recovery.

After the Marines, Duane returned to South Haven, Michigan, where the community gifted him a newly furnished house in honor of his heroism.

He worked at the Everett Piano Company for a few years prior to attending Michigan Veterans’ Vocational School at Pine Lake, Mi. There he learned to repair office machines and typewriters, and after completion he opened and operated his own business, South Haven Office Machines, until 1973. He also drove bus for South Haven Public Schools for several years.

“He was working on the line at Everett when President Eisenhower called to congratulate him on the medal”, remembered Arline. “It was such a distraction at work that the supervisor sent him home early”, she laughed.

In 1973, Duane and Bertha retired, sold their South Haven house, and moved to Irons, Mi. To their hunting cabin. That same year they started their annual trek to Gainesville, Florida for the winter to visit their grandsons. Dewey was married to his wife Bertha for 68 yrs before her passing in 2020.

Described as a “backwoods country boy”, by his daughter, Duane didn’t like the limelight and rarely spoke of his bravado. “He was a real family man, who enjoyed spending holidays with his family in Muskegon”, she fondly recalled.

The hero is survived by his daughter Arline Broome of South Haven, MI, son Dwight Dewey of Durham, NC, and grandsons Lenny and Denny. Numerous services are scheduled, with the last being on Nov 16th in Gainesville, Fla on what would have been his 90th birthday. Among those planning to attend along with family will be the administrator of the nursing home in which Dewey spent his last couple of years, a General of the Armed Services, and the Governor of Florida.

A fond and fitting farewell to a well-loved soldier. Mr. Dewey, your country salutes you!



Dewey’s plaque at the Memorial Park in Fruitport

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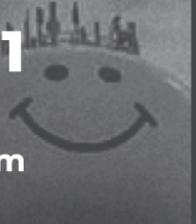
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