

Medal of Honor Recipient Thomas M. Doherty



Thomas M. Doherty was born May 11, 1869 in Mitchelstown, County Cork, Ireland. He emigrated, alone, to the United States at age 16, arriving at the port of New York on August 12, 1885. He made his way to Newcastle, Maine and listed Newcastle as his home of record and his occupation as coachman when he enlisted in the 21st Infantry, US Army in September, 1891 at age 22. Stationed at Plattsburgh Barracks, apparently Army life suited him, as he made it his career, re-enlisting several times and serving until his death at age 37.

Thomas Doherty became a US citizen on February 1, 1897 while still at Plattsburgh Barracks. As a member of Company H, Doherty participated in the battle of Santiago, Cuba on July 1, 1898. With 4 Privates and a musician from his company, Corporal Doherty received the Medal of Honor for risking his life to rescue wounded soldiers. The citation reads: *Gallantly assisted in the rescue of the wounded from in front of the lines and under heavy fire from the enemy.* The Medal was awarded to him on June 22, 1899. The battle of Santiago is better known as the battle of San Juan Hill and all accounts of the battle describe it as a hell on earth. The Spanish had the high ground and the skills of Cuban guerillas, allowing them to rain heavy fire on the Americans. Although the Americans ultimately won the battle, it was at a heavy cost with 205 killed and 1,180 wounded, while the defeated Spanish lost only 58 dead, 170 wounded, and 39 captured.

The 21st returned to Plattsburgh in August, 1898, and Doherty spent the months of September and October in hospital in Boston, Mass, probably as a result of dysentery or malaria contracted in Cuba. He rejoined his unit, and the 21st was sent to Manila in April, 1899, fighting in three expeditions during the Philippine Insurrection. Doherty spent six weeks in hospital in Manila, re-enlisting after his release, but he transferred to the 15th Infantry. Unfortunately, Doherty became ill again and spent from October, 1900 through at least May, 1901 in hospital at Ft. Grant, Arizona, then transferred to hospital at Ft. Reno, Oklahoma Territory in late April, 1902. He was transferred from the 15th to the 4th Infantry in March, 1904 and was appointed Battery Sergeant Major, moving him from combat readiness to administration. In April of 1906, Doherty came with the 4th Infantry to Fort Thomas, Kentucky as a Color Sgt., part of the Color Guard. He received orders to transfer once more in August, 1906 – this time to Ft. Benjamin Harrison in Indiana. Before he could be transferred, however, Thomas Doherty committed suicide sometime during the night of September 21, 1906, using his service revolver. He had apparently been drinking heavily and was reportedly despondent. Services were held at the post hospital and Doherty was buried in the soldiers section of Evergreen Cemetery in Southgate, Kentucky. He was 37 years old and had served his adopted country for 15 years. His only survivor was his mother in Ireland.

Contemporary news reports state that the 4th Infantry was preparing to deploy to Cuba, as there was still unrest there. We can only speculate whether Doherty's bouts with illness were a result of dysentery, malaria or PTSD, but his experiences in Cuba and the Philippines could certainly contribute to a wish not to return to the battlefield.

(Written by Deanna Beineke. Information taken from immigration records, military records and newspaper accounts.)