

BRIGADIER GENERAL HIRAM I. BEARSS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS, DECEASED

Hiram Eddings Bearss was born in Indiana, on April 13, 1875, and was killed in an automobile accident at Columbia, Indiana, on August 26, 1938.

Appointed a Second Lieutenant in the U. S. Marine Corps on May 27, 1898, he served throughout the Spanish-American War, and until February 21, 1899, when he was honorably discharged. Reappointed in the U. S. Marine Corps he was commissioned a First Lieutenant, June 2, 1899, and subsequently attained the rank of Colonel (temporary) July 1, 1918. He was transferred to the Retired List, in that rank, as a result of physical disability on November 22, 1919, and was advanced to the rank of Brigadier General on January 16, 1936.

During his career in the U. S. Marine Corps, he had duty in the Philippine Islands between December 1899 and May 1902, and while there served with Major Waller's Battalion in Samar (October 1901 March 1902); in Panama (December 1903 March 1904); in Cuba (February, March and April 1913); in Mexico (April August 1914), during which time he participated in the occupation of the city of Vera Cruz and the engagement incident thereto) and in Santo Domingo (June 1916 May 1917). He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor March 13, 1934. The citation follows in part:

"For extraordinary heroism and eminent and conspicuous conduct in battle at the junction of the Cadacan and Sojoton Rivers, Samar, P. I., November 1901. General Bearss, then Captain, second in command of the columns upon their uniting ashore in the Schoton region, made a surprise attack of the fortified cliffs and completely routed the enemy, killing 30 and capturing and destroying the powder magazine, 40 lantacas (guns), rice, food and quartels. Due to his courage, intelligence, discrimination and zeal, he successfully led his men up the cliffs by means of bamboo ladders to a height of 200 feet. The cliffs were of soft stone of volcanic origin, in the nature of pumice and were honey-combed with caves. Tons of rocks were suspended in platforms held in position by vine cables (known as bejuco) in readiness to be precipitated upon people below. After driving the insurgents from their position which was almost impregnable, being covered with numerous trails, lined with poisoned spears, pits, etc., he led his men across the river, scaled the cliffs on the opposite side, and destroyed the camps there. He and the men under his command overcame incredible difficulties and dangers in destroying positions which, according to reports from old prisoners, had taken three years to perfect, were held as a final rallying point, and were never before penetrated by white troops. General Bearss also rendered distinguished public service in the presence of the enemy at Quanapundan River, Samar, P. I., on January 19, 1902."

During World War I, he served with distinction in command of the 102nd Infantry, 52nd Brigade, 26th Division, American Expeditionary Forces, France. He served there from August 20, 1917, to December 14, 1918, and was awarded the following decorations:

Distinguished Service Medal (Army) -- "For exceptionally meritorious and distinguished services. He commanded with distinction the 102nd Infantry, achieving notable success in the active operations in which that regiment was engaged. By his untiring energy and dauntless courage in overcoming the numerous difficulties confronting him he gave proof of military leadership of a high order."

Distinguished Service Medal (Navy) same as above.

Distinguished Service Cross (Army) -- "For extraordinary heroism in action at Marcheville and Riaville, France, September 26, 1918, while commanding the 102nd Infantry, U. S. A. Colonel Bearss' indomitable courage and leadership led to the complete success of the attack by two battalions of his regiment on Marcheville and Riaville. During the attack, these two towns changed hands four times finally remaining in our possession until the troops were ordered to withdraw. Under terrific machine gun and artillery fire, Colonel Bearss was the first to enter Marcheville where he directed operations. Later upon finding his party completely surrounded, he personally assisted in fighting the enemy off with pistol and hand grenades."

Croix de Guerre with Palm, Order #14, 135 "D" for: "A unit of the first order, led by Colonel Hiram I. Bearss, who was conducting the attack in the front line, it brilliantly executed by splendid effort a particularly difficult operation, fighting valiantly with superb spirit. Was victorious after a desperate combat with an enemy superior in number and tenacious, entrenched in concrete shelters, strongly supported by numerous machine guns and a powerful artillery and employing infamous tricks during the course of the action. It heroically accomplished its mission in capturing by main force a village which it held all day in spite of four enemy counter attacks, thus giving the finest example of courage, abnegation and sacrifice."

Croix de Guerre with Palm Order #16, 702 "D", for: "A very courageous officer. He led two battalions to the victorious attack of Marcheville and Riaville on September 26, 1918. During this attack these two villages changed hands four times and finally remained in our possession until our troops received orders to withdraw. He was the first to enter Marcheville where he directed the operations. He and his men having been surrounded, he defended himself with his pistol and hand grenades."

Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, Order #189, for: "Commanding a Battalion occupying a sector, he brilliantly repulsed a violent surprise attack, held all his positions intact, inflicted severe losses on the enemy, made a large number of prisoners and captured material."

Legion of Honor (Officer) (French). Citation same as Croix de Guerre with Palm Order #16, 702 "D".

Italian Croce da Guerra (War Cross)

A destroyer the USS BEARSS (DD 654) has been named in his honor. The BEARSS was sponsored by Mrs. Louise I. Bearss, widow of Brigadier General Bearss.

7 June 1951.