

Deeds of Valor

How America's Civil War Heroes won the Medal of Honor

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Better Work Without The Drum



ROLLED OVER AND OVER

Benjamin B. Levy

On that memorable retreat from Richmond, June 30, 1862, the First New York Volunteers, in which Benjamin Levy was the drummer, had been on picket duty the night before, and it consequently fell to their lot to cover the retreat. In this position they were considerably harassed by sharpshooters and guerrillas who lay in wait for those who fell by the wayside. Levy, who was little over sixteen years old, was marching with his tent-mate who was sick with malaria, and in his feeble condition could make but slow progress. He was about to lie down, when Levy broke his drum and cast it aside, took the accoutrements and gun of his sick comrade, and encouraged him to keep up so as to avoid capture.

This regiment became engaged that afternoon in the battle of Charles City Cross Roads, Va. (or Glendale). Levy, being a drummer, was not obliged to go into action. He reported, however, to his superior officer and bravely volunteered to shoulder a rifle and participate in the action on

the firing line. His brave offer being accepted he proceeded to the front with his regiment and thus became actively engaged in the fighting.

There were four colors in this engagement belonging to the regiment. All but two of the color-bearers and corporals were killed or wounded. Immediately he threw away his gun, which he still carried in one hand, grasped the other flag and, with a stand of colors on each should beat a hasty retreat, during which he received a slight flesh wound.

On emerging from the woods with the two colors, he met General Phil Kearney, who was in command of his division at that time. The general inquired what regiment he belonged to, and on being informed, directed him to the point where the remnant of the regiment was stationed. For his gallantry in rescuing the two colors he was then and there promoted to General Kearney to be color-sergeant.

The day after, at the battle of Malvern Hill, the regiment had been marching, and the men were so covered with dust, that their uniforms looked more gray than blue. While obeying an order to cross an open field, they were fired upon by one of the Union batteries stationed on a hill, the gunners mistaking them for Confederates. The colonel, Garret Dyckman, seeing the danger of his regiment ordered the men to lie down, and directed Levy to unfurl his flag, advance down the center of the field and wave the colors until the firing should cease. Levy promptly obeyed and, when the firing stopped, was about to return to the regiment, when a volley from the enemy's pickets or sharpshooters, lined along the edge of the woods, opened upon him. The staff of the colors was struck, and a ball pierced the tin cup attached to his haversack. He lay down, tore his handkerchief into strips, with which he tied his colors up, and then rolled over and over back to the regiment, arrive safe amid the laughter and applause of his comrades.

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Summary: Personal reminiscences and records of officers and enlisted men who were rewarded by Congress for conspicuous acts of bravery during the Civil War.