

CHAPLAIN FRANCIS DUFFY

The most decorated Chaplain in US Army history was a Cobourg boy. Born in 1871, the third of 11 children of Irish immigrants, Francis Patrick Duffy grew up here before attending St. Michael's College in Toronto.

Following graduation he secured a teaching job in New York City, but soon began to study for the priesthood and was ordained priest at St. Michael's Church, Cobourg in 1896. After graduate studies he joined the faculty of St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, New York, teaching philosophy for fourteen years. One student called him an "Irish Socrates, not a lecturer, but a teacher who probed the mind of each student, sometimes in a disquieting fashion."

Although Fr. Duffy served briefly as a chaplain during the Spanish-American War (1898), it was as a scholar that he first achieved national renown. He helped found The New York Review, promoting the latest theological advances and biblical scholarship. However, when such thinking came under a cloud of suspicion with his superiors, Duffy was reassigned to a converted storefront church in the Bronx. In time he built a full-standing church, a school, and a day nursery for working parents where all faiths were welcome.

In 1916, as the US looked towards participation in World War I, Fr. Duffy was appointed chaplain to one of the most famous regiments in US Army history, the 69th New York Regiment, proudly called the Fighting 69th.

"I come to you in soldiers' togs, with a message from the church. I want to be your friend, whatever your religion may be. I know many of you are leaving families behind you and will have many worries. Come to me with them and you will find me ready with a wide word and a merry one."

Once overseas, Fr. Duffy proved himself every bit a part of the regiment he served. One news reporter described Duffy as:

...covered with mud and grime ...in the thick of the fighting, cheering on the living, administering the last rites of his Church to the dying, filling the place of a stretcher bearer who had been struck down by a bullet, assisting the wounded, darting hither and yon, a ministering angel ...for 117 hours he was under fire without rest.

Sources:

Washington Post - November 11, 2011; New York Daily News - June 30, 1932

Fr. F. P. Duffy Council 1970 Knights of Columbus

He would remain on active duty until 1920, when he became Pastor of Holy Cross Church on West 42nd Street. For his gallantry Fr. Duffy was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Conspicuous Service Cross, the Legion d'Honneur and the Croix de guerre. In the 1940 film, *The Fighting 69th*, Fr. Duffy's part was played by Pat O'Brien.

On June 30, 1932, the New York Daily News reported:

"50,000 forgot sectarian ties... in love and respect... for a friend, soldier and priest... Father Duffy

Rarely has such universal show of affection, breaking all sectarian lines, been shown for a priest as was exhibited for the late Father Duffy yesterday."

On May 2, 1937 an eight foot statue of Father Duffy was unveiled in New York's Times Square and remains there to this day.

