

George Dilboy

The first Greek-American to receive after his death the [Medal of Honor](#) from the U.S. Congress for bravery and valor "above and beyond the call of duty." The history of Greek-American hero of World War II begins from Alatsata of Asia Minor (today Alaçati, Turkey) where he was born on February 5, 1896.

He was a son of the large family of Antonios and Giasemi (nee Kotaris) Dilboy with its eight children. His ancestors had gone to Alatsata from Chios. Without verification, it is said that some ancestor came from Scotia and in this manner the suffix "boy" was added to the family surname—naturally, an erroneous etymology.

The first member of the family to immigrate to America is the father, Antonios, in 1907. Three years later, the three eldest sons follow: Demetrios, George and Nicholas. In 1911, the eldest daughter Marianthi would come to be wed in America to the Alatsatian John Zacharoulis; she would die in 1918 of natural causes (the same year George would be killed).

The father works at Boston General Hospital, and his children will work there as well. George will continue his schooling and later work as an employee in a shoe factory in Keene, New Hampshire, as well as an employee of Boston's Copley Square Hotel.

From American immigration records [\[i\]](#), we learn that sixteen year old Georgios Dilbois, still a student, says farewell to his mother Giasemi in Alatsata and departs from the port of Patras on the ship "Alice" on December 20, 1909, with Boston as his final destination.

He reaches New York on January 6, 1910. He is five feet, seven inches tall, with dark complexion, black hair and brown eyes. His father Antonios Dilboy waits for him. During the immigration medical examination, he is referred for medical treatment (in hospital), and subsequently he is discharged when well.

In 1914, George Dilboy, age eighteen, follows the team organized by the priest Fr. Amvrosios Paraschakis, coming with them to Greece in order to fight the Turks. Following the rebuff by Venizelos, he remains for almost a whole year in Chios to where his mother and siblings fled during the years of the First Persecution (1914-1918). Again saying farewell in February, 1915, he leaves for America. This would be the last time they saw him.

In 1916, he enlists in the American Army, serving in H Company, 103d Infantry Regiment, 26th Division, at Keene, New Hampshire. For an entire year, under command of the General [John Pershing](#), he participates in the successful “national security” military operation against Poncho Villa’s uprising in the northern borders of Mexico (the “Mexican Expedition” or “Border Campaign” of 1916-1917—Ed.). Upon his honorable discharge, he will have earned three awards: the Distinguished Service Cross, the Medal of Democracy, and the Mexican Service Medal.

By May, 1918, near the end of World War I, the American Army had successfully reinforced the Allied Powers England and France. Together, they unleashed a successful counteroffensive across the Marne River to seize German positions at Château -Thierry and Flandre, France (July 18-August 4, 1918).

George Dilboy had voluntarily re-enlisted and had been sent to France. On July 18, he is with his platoon on the front of the counteroffensive, in the Torcy - Belleau zone, Aisne-Marne Offensive [\[ii\]](#), in a place where the German guns guarded at the station of Bouresches in the railway at Belleau. With a mission for the platoon to seize the railway, the order was fulfilled by George Dilboy himself who gave his life during a superhuman effort.

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On January 19, 1919, in a letter to U.S. Army General George Brigkantier, Antonios Dilboy learns of the decision of the United States Congress to bestow the Medal of Honor to his heroic son for his courageous, brave military service above and beyond the call of duty. Amidst other comments, the American General recalls George Dilboy’s Greek heritage:

“A descendent of the race of Xenophon and Leonidas has revealed his right to stand with those

heroic souls. In allegiance to, and with faith in his adopted homeland (America), he overcame the moment, displaying the heroic virtues of those Greek ancestors from whom he hails...”

George Dilboy remained buried at the military cemetery at Argon, France, until 1922. His family, already having repatriated to Alatsata, sought in 1921 to have his remains transferred by the American government from France for internment in the ancestral land. With a special service in Paris, and among twenty other caskets of fallen soldiers of the Allied Powers, George Dilboy’s coffin would travel to Italy. With honors from representatives of the Italian government and escorted by an Army honor guard headed by James Testa, the casket wrapped in the Stars and Stripes would be transferred in July, 1922, by naval destroyer to Chios and then, from there, to Çeşme.

On July 10, 1922, an honor guard consisting of eight Greek troops, Mayor of Alatsata Demetrios Galatianos, American Consul S. Beleniotis, members of the deceased’s family, elders of the town, two young girls carrying his photograph, and a funeral director who carried the hero’s medals, were present with the American honor guard to welcome his relics to the land of Asia Minor.

It is said that 17,000 persons of all ages came from throughout Erythrae and arrived in Alatsata with the hearse and casket, which were placed in the center of the Church of “Panaghia” (Entry of the Theotokos—Ed.). Metropolitan Kallinikos of Krinis (Çeşme) conducted a memorial service and Mayor Galatianos spoke of the hero’s achievement.

From witnesses we know that the ranking American officer, James Testa, was offered hospitality that evening at Dilboy’s paternal home. It is also said that the town elders, as a sign of honor toward America and its representative who travelled from Paris to Alatsata with Dilboy’s remains, named the central square of Alatsata as “America Square” and renamed the main Smyrna street as James Testa street.

During the following days, the town elders met to first discuss the construction of a memorial at the place of final internment. To this end, suggestions include the central “America Square” or the area surrounding the Church of Panaghia, in front of the Metropolis offices. Drives for funds began and plans were offered for a magnificent monument, in proportion to the hero’s honor. Meanwhile, the casket remained in the Church of Panaghia, draped in the American flag.

The last persons to see the casket before Alatsata was captured in September, 1922, and who served as witnesses for American authorities were certain women, among whom were Kyriakoula Kazanas, Zoe Kakogiannis, and Maria Tsakitzis. According to written testimony provided to the American Consulate at Athens, they noted how the casket had been broken, the American flag ripped apart, and the remains scattered on the floor of the church.

Between October, 1922, and March, 1923, there is a difficult correspondence between the Dilboy's family and the American Consul who contacted generals, senators and, finally, the President of the United States himself, Warren Harding. Harding demands the transfer of Dilboy's remains to the USA and two diplomatic apologies from Turkey: for the insult to the dead hero of the American Army, and for the insult to the American flag.

Finally, a new American flag covers a new coffin (same style as the previous) that travels to America in October 1923, on a ship named Sapelo.

On November 12, 1923, he would be buried with honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

In America, the city council of Somerville honors him by a stadium and public pool that carry his name; the Commonwealth of Massachusetts places a marble plaque at the Capitol; and statues are erected at Arlington National Cemetery and in Illinois.

In Greece, he is honored by the municipalities of Virona and Nea Smyrna with the naming of roads; a public square is named for him at Nea Erythraia where likewise a bust of the hero is erected at the expense of the Fraternity of Alatsatians.

George Dilboy's Medal of Honor would come, with the years, into the hands of his youngest sister who lives with her family in Crete.

During the summer of 1941, German soldiers pillaged their home and, among other things, took the medal.

George Rozakis, a son of the family and the hero's nephew, petitioned the American Embassy, asking that the family obtain a replacement for the lost medal.

On April 14, 1999, following authorization by the President of the United States, American Ambassador to Greece Nicholas Burns, during a special honor ceremony, handed a new medal to George Dilboy's nephew, George Rozakis.

George Dilboy was honored by four American Presidents:

- 1) Woodrow Wilson, who signs the legislation awarding the Medal of Honor in January, 1919;
- 2) Warren Harding, by whose order the remains of the here were transferred from Alatsata to the USA in 1923;
- 3) Calvin Coolidge, who presided at his final internment at Arlington National Cemetery; and, finally,
- 4) Bill Clinton, with the restoration of the lost medal in 1999.

[i] http://www.ellisland.org/search/passRecord.asp?MID=04147254830230773632&LNM=DELBOIS&PLNM=DELBOIS&first_kind=1&last_kind=0&TOWN=null&SHIP=null&RF=10&pID=101256020282

[ii] Είναι μια ωραία παραπομπή για να μπει κάποιος να δει αλλά δεν ξέρω τον τρόπο από

τις λέξεις τις παραγράφου.

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