



# Ancient Order of Hibernians

JOHN CARDINAL D'ALTON DIVISION 3

*May 2020*

## Brother Hibernians \_\_\_\_\_



It has been three months since our last newsletter or division meeting, and I hope all are well and had a good Memorial Day weekend. Given the situation, we've gotten by on interim communications, but we thought it would be time to get out at least this interim version of a newsletter.

It has been a hard several months for our Division and for many in our area, but we hope and pray we are beyond the worst of it. While we have had our losses, most brothers and family who survived the coronavirus have now recovered. Many are now looking for a path to normalcy, and chances are, that is taking longer than anyone wants.

Left and right, our members have been stepping up, whether it be to get food to those stuck in quarantine or couldn't shop for themselves, or just checking in on family, friends and neighbors. I'd especially like to thank a team of volunteers, working with Bill Young and a well-crafted cut of our roster, to make individual outreach, by email or phone, to a large portion of our membership.

Our Division 3 officers, along with Hibernian House officers and those division 3 members on the AOH County Board met virtually about a week ago to connect on current affairs, with a focus on how Division 3 could aid those in the greatest need. During the heart of the pandemic, we donated \$650 of prepared meals to Good Samaritan, Nyack and Valley Hospitals for those ICU heroes who were taking care of our ill brothers and family members. Now, it was time to take care of those suffering the economic affects of the pandemic. We approved four separate donations of \$500 to each of the American Legion Post 329 Relief Fund, and three local Catholic charity efforts (more details to come on that in near future).

The division may be taking in fewer charity dollars with the no golf outing, but we are still in a good financial position, and this is a time of incredible need. Even with the golf tournament cancelled, on the day when the tournament would have occurred, Sean Walsh's brother Jimmy donated 500 high quality surgical masks in the memory of Larry Cain for the use of those in need in the division and beyond. Shortly after that, Mike Lawler and Andy Nobel, grandson of longtime former Division 3 member Pat O'Leary donated another 500 masks in Pat's name which we are now distributing through the other Rockland County AOH divisions. We thank Jimmy Walsh, Mike Lawler and Andy Nobel for their generous donations.

Another substantial accomplishment during the last several months was the successful completion of another scholarship campaign. We congratulate Kevin McNulty, Neil Cosgrove, Dermot Moore and the rest of the scholarship committee for conducting the process, including

the written test – some tests taken under quarantine – under these most unusual conditions. Read the following article with details on our nine scholars.

Good & Welfare – Please remember John Crilley, Larry Cronin and Gene Flood, all fighting various medical issues, in your prayers. Please also remember the eight members we have lost since March 15 – Jim Harding, Phil Sheridan, Larry Kaine, Dan O’Keefe, Rich Lenihan, John Gannon, Warren Hennessey and George Leahy. Also, note that last week was EMS week – our first responders and medical professionals deserve all the prayers we can muster. And finally, coming off Memorial Day, even with all going on, let’s not forget those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country and us, and remember all still serving.

Yours in Friendship, Unity and Christian Charity,

**Chuck Parnow**

## Division Scholarships



As mentioned above, the division scholarship process was completed as planned. Committee members Kevin McNulty and Neil Cosgrove, working with state scholarship chair Dermot Moore, collected and reviewed the applications, provided the Irish history test material and conducted the exam (following social distancing protocols, of course!).

Following are our 2020 Scholars:

Scholarship Recipient:	Scholarship in Memory of:
Dean Tobin	Phillip Sheridan
Kathleen Peterson	Laurence Kaine
Kaleigh Schofield	John Gannon
Fiona Peterson	Richard Lenihan
Mairead Parnow	Daniel O’Keefe
Stephen Doorley	James Harding
Kian McGeever	Kathleen and Patrick “Joe” McKiernan
Olivia Flynn	Christine, Kathleen and Ray Gallagher
Abigail Redmond	John And Robert McKiernan

We congratulate the nine students who earned scholarships. Under very trying circumstances, they persevered, and we recognize their accomplishments and wish we could do more in a senior year of high school missing so many of the staples of one’s final days in school. Without a Hibernian Mass or Communion Breakfast, our committee improvised and adapted – visiting each scholar to present their certificate of accomplishment and a check (accompanied by some of our county leaders). More on that, along with pictures in a future communication!

***An-mhaith! [Well done!]***

## Hibernian House



While the Hibernian House has been closed, Frank and the extended team has been identifying those improvements best done with the pub closed, particularly focused on the work necessary to get us safely open. So, that means small things like well needed spring cleaning, including a thorough cleaning and repaint of the kitchen, as well as the addition of some more substantial items, like a new glass sanitizer for the downstairs bar, and new air conditioning units for the bar. Ultimate re-opening is going to require a full and thorough sanitizing of the entire facility. These projects are all in various states of completion, with the intent of having the pub open as soon as we can do so safely.

We will keep everyone informed via email, call and post and Facebook, of plans to re-open as soon as we know more about logistics and timing.

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## May History

### Col. William J. O'Brien's Last Stand on Saipan



As the dark clouds of war gathered over America in the fall of 1940, the 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the N.Y. National Guard was called to active service. The regiment, recruited from Troy, NY and the surrounding area, had been sent to Fort McClellan to begin the rigorous training that would transform them from part-time to full-time soldiers.

They were conducting an exercise where they would run and on command drop to the ground in a position ready to fire their weapons. Some may have noticed the approach of Captain William J. O'Brien and his Sergeant Charles Whalen on their way to pick up the company's payroll. Unlike most of his men, this was not O'Brien's first war, he had enlisted as a private in 1917 and remained with N.Y. National Guard after W.W. I. Per Army regulation, O'Brien and his Sargent were both "spit 'n polish" in Class A uniforms to present themselves to the paymaster. On observing the men, O'Brien exclaimed to his Sargent, "*Look at those* (expletive), *they are not doing it right!*" He ran over to the men and began demonstrating the proper technique, covering himself in mud in the process.

Once the men had the exercise down, he returned to his quarters to change into a new uniform. Besides the basics of the drill, the men learned what type of officer they had: one who would never ask them to do something he would not do himself. As Sargent Whalen noted, O'Brien was a "*Soldier's Soldier*."

Four years later, O'Brien, now a Colonel and Commander, 1st Battalion 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 27th Infantry Division would confirm that he was indeed a "Soldier's Soldier." The 105<sup>th</sup>, as part of the Army's 27 infantry division along with two divisions of Marines, was part of the invasion of Saipan, the largest of the Mariana Islands. The naval portion of the attack is known to history as "The Battle of the Coral Sea." The island was of critical strategic importance as airfields on Saipan would put the Japanese homeland well within the range of U.S. B-29 bombers. The Japanese knew this, and the commander vowed that his men would contest every inch of the island and inflict a terrible toll on U.S. forces.

On 21 June 1944, O'Brien and his men were pinned by intense Japanese fire. Three American tanks were ordered to eliminate the strong point. As the tanks approached, they too came under intense fire, causing the commanders to "button up" inside the tank turret, relying on the limited view through the tank's periscopes for navigation and target identification. The tanks became disoriented and proceeded to fire into O'Brien's men. With the same lack of hesitation as he had shown when he saw his men doing a drill wrong, Col. O'Brien raced across the field as it was swept with enemy fire to climb onto the lead U.S. Tanks where O'Brien began pounding on the turret with his pistol butt till he had the commanders attention. Remaining outside the tank, fully exposed to enemy fire, O'Brien directed the tank's assault until the threat from the strongpoint was neutralized. Dismounting the tank, O'Brien saw one of his men severely wounded; he picked him up and personally carried him out of the range of enemy fire.

On 28 June 1944, O'Brien's battalion was ordered to take a ridge that the Japanese were bitterly defending. O'Brien decided to attempt the risky maneuver of splitting his force and attempt a coordinated attack on the enemy from both sides. Seeing the advanced element of one part of the assault stalled by intense Japanese opposition, Colonel O'Brien crossed 1,200 yards of sniper-infested underbrush to take command. Leaving some men to distract the enemy, O'Brien personally led four men through a narrow ravine behind the position eliminating it and capturing five machine guns and one 77mm artillery piece. When Major Kenneth J. Dolan linked up with O'Brien and his men, he recalled, "*there Bill O'Brien was right on top – the old nonchalant "Obie," talking a mile a minute with a cigarette dangling from his lips. Obie, with his battalion, had just completed one of those very dangerous maneuvers which, when successful, go down with the great deeds of history.*"

By 6 July, the U.S. forces held 60% of Saipan, and the Japanese commander, Col. Takuji Suzuki, realized they could not hold the rest of the island for long. While U.S. intelligence wrongly believed that most of the defenders were dead, he still had approximately 5,000 men under his command. Resolved to inflict the most severe damage possible to the U.S.

forces, and to avoid the dishonor of surrender, Col. Suzuki ordered a massed infantry attack known as *Gyokusai* in Japanese and a "Banzai charge" in the west as a form of honorable suicide. It would be the most massive such attack of the war.

After those Japanese soldiers too injured to walk committed ritual suicide, the remaining 4,500 Japanese launched their attack at 2:00 AM on 7 July, the point of attack being William O' Brien and the men of the 105<sup>th</sup>. Maj McCarthy of the second battalion said the attack *"reminded me of one of those old cattle stampede scenes of the movies. The camera is in a hole in the ground and you see the herd coming and then they leap up and over you and are gone. Only the Japs just kept coming and coming. I didn't think they'd ever stop."* Bloody hand-to-hand fighting was in progress everywhere; there could be little hope of the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> being able to withstand such overwhelming numbers against a foe with no thought for their own lives other than to take as many Americans with them as possible. However, Col. O'Brien and the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> were equally determined to sell their lives dearly to buy time for the rest of the U.S. forces to organize a defense.

With casualties mounting and ammunition running low, Col. O'Brien refused to leave the front lines. He was seen striding up and down the line with a pistol in each hand firing at the enemy while encouraging his men to hold as long as possible. Even when shot in the shoulder, O'Brien continued to fire at the enemy while the medic simultaneously applied a bandage.

When out of pistol ammunition, O'Brien grabbed a rifle from a wounded man and continue to fire while telling his men, *"Don't give a damn inch."* When that too ran out of ammunition, O'Brien ran to a Jeep that had a .50-caliber machine gun mount. As his men fell back to form a new line, they saw O'Brien standing up-right in the jeep, fully exposed, firing the machine gun as the Japanese human waves crashed on him. The next day after repulsing the Japanese attack, they found O'Brien's body surrounded by thirty dead Japanese.



LTC William J. O'Brien was awarded the Medal of Honor (posthumously) on 27 May 1945, in a ceremony at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York.

Memorial Day is a day we set aside to remember all those who gave the last full measure of devotion in defense of their country. We as Irish Americans can take particular pride and have a special duty, to remember the Irish, who were once accused of being incapable of being loyal Americans, are conspicuous on every American role of honor. We should never forget the Irish who wear their green every day on their graves in defense of our freedoms.