

John Frederick Andrews
Novels of the Great War



Frank George Welty was born in Utica, New York, to Emile S. and Marie-Anne Welty on 7/11/1892. At the age of fifteen, he knocked his high school principal down a flight of stairs during an argument and fled to Vermont where he joined a traveling vaudeville show as an acrobat.

He enlisted in the United States Army on 2/3/1911 at an Indianapolis recruiting station. His enlistment papers described him as being five-feet, five-inches in height, with fair complexion, blue eyes, and medium brown hair. He trained in the hospital corps after boot camp. He joined the 23rd Infantry on 2/29/1912. In 3/1/1912 he was stationed at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana, with the rank of private.

Welty was discharged from the Army on 2/2/1914 and enlisted in the Navy on the same day, also in Indianapolis. His monthly pay

was \$20 base, with an additional \$2 per month. He completed his training at the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, between 4/26/1914 to 6/30/1914. His initial rank was that of a Hospital Apprentice. He then served on the USS Missouri, USS Reina Mercedes (a Spanish cruiser captured in the Spanish American War, converted for training use by the US Navy), and the USS Tennessee. On 12/31/1915, he was promoted to Hospital Apprentice First Class and transferred to the US Navy Hospital at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He continued to serve there and was promoted to Pharmacist's Mate, Third Class on 12/1/1916, and then to Pharmacist's Mate, Second Class (PM-2) on 6/13/1917.

The exact time he transferred to the medical unit attached to the 5th Marine Regiment and circumstances of his trip to France are unclear. However, by March of 1917 he was a medical corpsman serving with the 66th Company of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. His regiment was active in Verdun between 3/17/1918 and 5/5/1918. The 4th Brigade of Marines, which included both the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments, went to a rest area for further training, during which time he was transferred to the medical unit taking care of the 20th Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5).

The 3/5 went on the attack against strongly held German positions in the Belleau Wood on 6/6/1918. They had to cross a broad wheat field over distances of 400-600 yards with no cover. Welty made it to a first aid station about 200 yards from the edge of the Wood. According to eye-witness accounts, he was working on four wounded men and had dressed wounds on three when he was hit by shrapnel in the back and leg. He continued to work and was filling out the wound tag for the fourth man when he was hit in the head by a machine gun bullet. He handed his wound tag booklet to the man and said, "They got me. Give the chief this book." He fell over, dead.

The wounded Marine, whose legs were broken, crawled back to shelter. After he was brought to an aid station, he gave the book to Chief Pharmacist's Mate Frank J. Tousic, USN.

Tousic wrote Welty's family with that story later. He said that he didn't remember the name of the Marine who related the story to him, and that the dead were left, unburied, in the open, machine gun-raked field. The bodies of the dead were later buried where they fell.

Commander Paul T. Desez, the 5th Regiment Surgeon, wrote: "Frank G. Welty displayed extraordinary heroism and conspicuous

gallantry in caring for and evacuating the wounded at Lucy-le-Bocage, June 6 1918. During the attack of the Third Battalion, Fifth United States Marines, Pharmacist's Mate Welty accompanied the first wave of the attacking troops rendering able assistance to the wounded and encouraging the men in the attack. Although previously wounded, he continued his work dressing the wounds of the men until fatally wounded by machine gun fire." With that letter, Dessez recommended Welty for the Distinguished Service Cross.

PM-2 Frank Welty was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross and the US Army Silver Star Medal for his service that day. His body was exhumed and reburied in the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery along with the other men who died in the Battle of Belleau Wood. On Saturday, 6/6/1925 a ceremony was held at the Navy Yard, San Diego, California in which one of the streets was named in his honor.



Photograph taken by the author

Sources:

Col. William T. Anderson USMC (retired) provided copies of the newspapers and other information used in this biography. The citation from Dessez was published in the *Utica NY Herald Dispatch* in 1920 (*Utica NY Herald Dispatch* 1920 - 1576.pdf)

John Frederick Andrews
Novels of the Great War

furnished by Col. Anderson. He also provided the photograph of Welty at the top of this biography.

Welty's service record was accessed on 3/23/17 from:

https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/18562316/photo/GO3MVDxNkz1pJ2dWLukCeMWUYBHUJu3ZQ_Q!KrUcE2iMeqKGgrpqgor!hOCH4paD

Other records were accessed on 3/23/17 from:

https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/18562316/photo/GO3MVDxNkz3IFz0CLpgBHbsnIgXjrSBOTGmU0_HOnZSMdCTpBCWAVm9VpUUrTaLL

Strott, George G. *Navy Medics with the Marines, 1917-1919: The Medical Department of the United States Navy with the Army and Marine Corps in France in World War I*. Reprint, Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, 2005 (Original publication: Washington D.C.: U.S. Navy, 1947.)