

Brigadier General Joseph J. Foss, U.S. Marine Corps

Captain Joseph J. Foss received his Medal of Honor citation for WW II and service in 1942: "For outstanding heroism and courage above and beyond the call of duty as executive officer of Marine Fighting Squadron 121, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, at Guadalcanal. Engaging in almost daily combat with the enemy from 9 October to 19 November 1942, Capt. Foss personally shot down 23 Japanese planes and damaged others so severely that their destruction was extremely probable. In addition, during this period, he successfully led a large number of escort missions, skillfully covering reconnaissance, bombing, and photographic planes as well as surface craft. On 15 January 1943, he added three more enemy planes to his already brilliant successes for a record of aerial combat achievement unsurpassed in this war. Boldly searching out an approaching enemy force on 25 January, Capt. Foss led his eight F4F Marine planes and four Army P-38s into action and, undaunted by tremendously superior numbers, intercepted and struck with such force that four Japanese fighters were shot down and the bombers were turned back without releasing a single bomb. His remarkable flying skill, inspiring leadership, and indomitable fighting spirit were distinctive factors in the defense of strategic American positions on Guadalcanal."

Biography: Joseph Foss was born and raised on a farm just outside Sioux Falls, SD. As a young man he was fascinated by the exploits of Charles A. Lindbergh and vowed to one day "trade his horse for a plow." He joined the Marines during WWII and, despite his age, became a pilot. Foss scored 26 kills during the war, tying Eddie Rickenbacker's WWI record. He later served as a colonel during the Korean War.

After Foss left the military, he went into politics, serving in the South Dakota legislature. In 1955, he became South Dakota's youngest governor, serving four years in that office. He was also an avid hunter and sportsman. He served as the American Football League's first president from 1959 to 1966, was the original host of ABC's The American Sportsman in 1965, and was president of the National Rifle Association from 1988 to 1990.

Foss was taken to the hospital 7 October 2002 after suffering a brain aneurysm. He never came out of his coma.

Military Awards and Other Honors: Medal of Honor, Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Purple Heart. Joe Foss was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in 1984, the University of South Dakota Henry Heider Coyote Sports Hall of Fame in 1988, the South Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame in 1991 (inaugural class), the South Dakota Sports Hall of Fame, the Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame, the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame in 1996, the American Combat Airman Hall of Fame in 1997 (inaugural class), the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame in 2001 (inaugural class), and the Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame in 2002. The regional airport in Sioux Falls, SD is Joe Foss Field, and the terminal features his statue.

Masonic History: Brother Joe Foss was a member of Minnehaha Lodge #5 in Sioux Falls, SD and a National Sojourner.