

## Patrick McGunigal



<b>Born</b>	May 30, 1876 Hubbard, Ohio
<b>Died</b>	January 19, 1936 (aged 59)
<b>Place of burial</b>	Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia
<b>Allegiance</b>	United States of America
<b>Service/branch</b>	United States Navy
<b>Rank</b>	Warrant Officer
<b>Unit</b>	USS <i>West Virginia</i>
<b>Battles/wars</b>	World War I
<b>Awards</b>	Medal of Honor

**Patrick McGunigal** (May 30, 1876 – January 19, 1936) was a sailor in the United States Navy who received the Medal of Honor for his actions during World War I.

McGunigal was born in Hubbard, Ohio on May 30, 1876 and died January 19, 1936. He enlisted in the navy at New York, Sept. 24, 1904. He retired from the Navy in 1920. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery Arlington, Virginia.

McGunigal was the First American Sailor to be awarded the Medal of Honor in World War I. McGunigal jumped overboard from a moving United States warship to rescue the drowning observer of a wrecked balloon, knowing that if he failed to land in the wreckage he would lose his own life But he did not miss his mark.

According to Lieutenant Hoyt's account of the incident: "Then they began to haul me down from the deck and the balloon suddenly fell between 300 and 400 feet in almost normal attitude, as far as I could tell. I thought it was going down to the water and prepared to jump as soon as the basket approached close enough to the water. The balloon seemed to hang in the air, however, and I got back in the basket and got out a knife to cut the lashing from the heavy line. Suddenly the starboard damping line parted and the basket swung out to port. Instantly the balloon began plunging and rolling at terrific speed. The basket, with myself in it, was thrown high in the air and came down on top of the balloon and then lashed out to the end of the suspension ropes. The balloon continued rolling and pitching violently. I was swung into the air a great many times and then dropped through space, part of the time head downwards, until the suspension ropes stopped the basket with a shock that nearly tore my hands off. Once I was swung backwards and upwards until my head hit one of the stabilizers, giving me several minor scalp wounds. I got a glimpse of the ship and the water under me and knew that they were still hauling me on deck."

“Finally the basket struck the water and immediately began to fill. The mouth was toward the bow of the ship, which was still under way, and it was rapidly being dragged under. I had made every effort to get through the tangled mass of rigging, which was by this time twisted tight over the top of the basket, but was able to free only my head and one arm. My movements were further impeded by the heavy leather clothing which I wore. I called for a heaving line, but my head was quickly carried under and I had reached the limit of my endurance when a hand pulled my head above the water.”

“The hand I found later belonged to Patrick McGunigal, shipfitter first class, United States Navy, who had gone overboard fully clothed to try and save me. He did. When he got my head out of the water he put the bowline, which was thrown to him, around my shoulders and I was pulled up to the deck. McGunigal was in imminent danger himself of being caught in the tangled wreckage and carried under, but he paid no attention to that. I undoubtedly would have been drowned had it not been for his help.”

The act was witnessed by the commander of the vessel. He immediately recommended the Irishman for a Medal of Honor. "I recommend," he wrote, "that Patrick McGunigal, shipfitter first class, U. S. Navy, be presented with a Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism in the line of his profession, in saving the life of Lieutenant Hoyt."

### **Citation**

For extraordinary heroism while attached to the Huntington. On the morning of 17 September 1917, while the U.S.S. Huntington was passing through the war zone, a kite balloon was sent up with Lt. (j.g.) H. W. Hoyt, U.S.

Navy, as observer. When the balloon was about 400 feet in the air, the temperature suddenly dropped, causing the balloon to descend about 200 feet, when it was struck by a squall. The balloon was hauled to the ship's side, but the basket trailed in the water and the pilot was submerged. McGunigal, with great daring, climbed down the side of the ship, jumped to the ropes leading to the basket, and cleared the tangle enough to get the pilot out of them. He then helped the pilot to get clear, put a bowline around him, and enabled him to be hauled to the deck. A bowline was lowered to McGunigal and he was taken safely aboard.