

Greenup County's Medal of Honor recipients from the Korean Conflict

The Medal of Honor, the highest award for military valor in the U.S., officially began when President Abraham Lincoln acknowledged individuals for their gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in 1861. Fewer than 3,500 soldiers have received the Medal of Honor with 43 medals accredited to soldiers from Kentucky. Greenup County, Ky. holds the distinction of being the only county in the country with multiple Medal of Honor recipients from the same war. These medals were awarded to Corporal John Collier and Private First Class Ernest West for their actions during the Korean conflict.



During a third attempt to neutralize an enemy machine gun under enemy fire and grenades on Sept. 19, 1950, Collier moved ahead of his comrades, destroyed the machine gun nest and killed several enemy soldiers. When an enemy grenade landed in the midst of his comrades upon his return, Collier threw himself upon the grenade, sacrificing his life to save his comrades.

Upon nearing an enemy outpost on Oct. 12, 1952, grenades began to roll down toward the mission's company, which included West. When a grenade exploded near the lieutenant and two other soldiers, West ordered a retreat, while running through heavy fire to rescue his lieutenant. West successfully carried the lieutenant to safety and returned for another wounded comrade, using his own body as a shield against enemy soldiers attacking. As he rescued the second man, a grenade exploded near him; numbing his left arm and sending shrapnel into his eye. Despite being injured, West returned to help yet another wounded man.

Oral histories with West and other Kentucky veterans can be found at <http://passtheword.ky.gov>. Photo by artist Rich Griendling.

"Pass the Word" is a discovery tool for oral histories throughout the state of Kentucky. To learn more about this topic, visit <http://passtheword.ky.gov>.