

On the 150th anniversary of the Medal of Honor, more about some Central New Yorkers who earned their country's highest tribute

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Debra J. Groom / The Post-Standard
By

Medal of Honor: Central New York Courage and Sacrifice

2011 marks the 150th anniversary of the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government, and a distinction that has been earned by many Central New Yorkers throughout history.

This year is the 150th anniversary of the creation of the Medal of Honor, the United States' highest award for military valor and gallantry.

An act of Congress established the medal, and President Abraham Lincoln signed the act into law in December 1861. The largest number of recipients with ties to Central New York served in the Civil War, but criteria then for receiving the medal were less stringent than they are now.

Dennis Connors, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association, said many Civil War flag bearers received the medal for keeping the colors in sight during battle or picking up the colors after the former flag bearer fell.

From 1920 to 1940, the Medal of Honor was presented to a number of people not engaged in combat, such as Charles Lindbergh for his trans-Atlantic flight and Richard Byrd for flying over the North Pole.

The medal presented to Civil War surgeon Dr. Mary Walker, of Oswego, was revoked in 1917, because she hadn't served in combat with the enemy. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter reinstated her medal.



On July 25, 1963, Congress established a set of guidelines under which the Medal of Honor can be awarded and are still in effect: The individual must be a member of the Armed Forces and distinguish himself or herself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty, while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States or serving with a U.S. ally against a belligerent party.

Here are some Medal of Honor recipients with ties to Central New York and why they received it.



File photo

Dr. Mary Walker is the only woman to receive the Medal of Honor. She was born and raised in the town of Oswego and worked as a field surgeon during the Civil War.

Onondaga County

Robert Howard McCard, born in Syracuse Nov. 25, 1918, enlisted in the Marines in 1939 and served during World War II. He was in the field Jan. 31, 1944, until June 16, 1944, when he was killed during battle on the island of Saipan in the Pacific. When his tank was knocked out of action by a battery of enemy 77 millimeter guns, McCard carried on, using all of the tank's weapons on the enemy. When the severity of hostile fire caused

him to order his crew out the escape hatch, McCard continued to hurl hand grenades to cover the evacuation of his men. Although he was seriously wounded and he had exhausted his supply of grenades, McCard dismantled one of the tank's machine guns and fired vigorously into Japanese positions, killing 16 of the enemy before being killed himself.

Forrest Vosler, from Marcellus and Memphis, served as a radio operator-air gunner on a heavy bombardment aircraft in a mission over Bremen, Germany, in December 1943. His plane was damaged by antiaircraft fire, and he was wounded in the legs, thighs, chest and face, impairing his vision. But Vosler kept up a steady stream of deadly fire and got a disabled radio operating well enough to send out distress signals. The plane ditched in the water, and Vosler exited and kept a wounded tail gunner from slipping off the plane, while others hurried them both into a dinghy.

Oswego County

Oswego County boasts one of the most famous Medal of Honor recipients — **Dr. Mary Walker**, the only woman to receive the award.

Walker, who was born and raised in the town of Oswego and taught at the Minetto School, worked as a field surgeon near the Union front lines. She often crossed Confederate lines to treat civilians. Walker was taken prisoner in 1864 by Confederate troops and imprisoned in Richmond for four months.

Two other Oswego County recipients were Sandy Creek brothers **Allen and James Thompson** — one of only seven sets of brothers to receive the country's top honor. They enlisted as privates in the 4th New York Heavy Artillery

Regiment in the Civil War.

During the Appomattox Campaign of March and April 1865 in Virginia, the regiment served as infantry rather than artillery. On April 2, their brigade was pursuing Confederate forces outside of Petersburg, when it came across what seemed to be deserted Confederate fortifications. The Thompson brothers and five others volunteered to check it out. As they advanced through the forest, the group was ambushed by about 50 Confederate soldiers. Ordered to lay down their guns and surrender, the Thompsons and the others instead chose to fire, even though they were less than 100 feet from the larger enemy force. The brothers survived the skirmish.

Madison County

Wilson Smith, a corporal in Battery H, 3rd New York Light Artillery, was born in the town of Madison and enlisted in Madison to serve in the Civil War. During a Sept. 6, 1862, battle in Washington, N.C., Smith “took command of a gun — the lieutenant in charge having disappeared — and fired the same so rapidly and effectively that the enemy was repulsed, although for a time a hand-to-hand conflict was had over the gun,” according to his medal citation. He is buried in Rome Cemetery.

Charles Kenyon, born in Oneida in 1840, was a Navy fireman in the Civil War. On May 15, 1862, his ship, the Calena, attacked Drewry’s Bluff, Va., a Confederate stronghold that rose 90 feet above the James River and commanded a sharp bend in the river. Kenyon was “severely burned while extricating a priming wire, which had become bent and fixed in the bow gun while his ship underwent terrific shelling from the enemy. Kenyon hastily dressed his hands with cotton waste and oil and courageously returned to his gun while enemy sharpshooters in rifle pits along the (river) banks continued to direct their fire at the men at the guns,” his medal citation reads.

Cayuga County

Medal of Honor recipient **Robert Buffum** wasn’t from Cayuga County, but died there at the State Asylum for Insane Criminals at Auburn. He had been sentenced to prison for killing a man who said harsh words about President Lincoln. He slashed his own throat in his prison cell and was buried in the Auburn Correctional Facility-Soule Cemetery, in the town of Sennett.

Serving as a Union soldier in the Civil War, Buffum was a member of Andrews Raiders. The band of 22 spies sneaked into Confederate territory in 1862, capturing a train, burning railroad bridges and disrupting Confederate communications. Buffum was awarded the Medal of Honor March 25, 1863 — the third person in the country to receive it — for his heroism. He also served with John Brown, in Kansas, before the Civil War. Buffum committed suicide July 20, 1871.



The veterans post in Montezuma is named for Medal of Honor recipient **Robert F. Stryker**, who died while saving fellow soldiers in Vietnam.

Stryker realized several wounded members of his squad were within range of an enemy



Robert F. Stryker

mine that was about to go off. His medal citation says, "with complete disregard for his safety, he threw himself upon the mine as it was detonated. He was mortally wounded as his body absorbed the blast and shielded his comrades from the explosion. His unselfish actions were responsible for saving the lives of at least six of his fellow soldiers."

In 1969, his family received the Medal of Honor. He is the most recent native of Central New York to receive the award.

CNY Medal of Honor recipients

In all, some 51 people with ties to Central New York have received the Medal of Honor since it was instituted in December 1861, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society archives. Besides honorees previously mentioned, other recipients are listed by county:

OSWEGO

Harry Chapman Adriance, Marine Corps, China Relief Expedition (Boxer Rebellion) entered service in Massachusetts, born in Oswego.

Neil Bancroft, Army, Indian campaigns, entered service in Illinois, born in Oswego.

Carlton William Barrett, Army, World War II, entered service in New York, born in Fulton.

Stephen Edwin Chandler, Army, Civil War, entered service in Granby, born in Michigan.

James Coey, Army, Civil War, entered service in Oswego, born in New York City.

Cornelius Minor Hadley, Army, Civil War, entered service in Michigan, born in Sandy Creek.

John Porter Hatch, Army, Civil War, entered service in Oswego, born in Oswego.

James Lee, Navy, Civil War, entered service in New York, born in New York state, buried in Rural Cemetery, Oswego.

Henry E. Plant, Army, Civil War, entered service in Michigan, born in Oswego County.

Clifford Thomson, Army, Civil War, entered service in New York City, born in Fulton.

John Tribe, Army, Civil War, entered service in Oswego, born in Tioga County.

LeRoy Williams, Army, Civil War, entered service in Genesee County, born in Oswego.



MADISON



Damian Dovarganes / The Associated Press

This is the Medal of Honor presented by President Ronald Reagan to Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez in 1981. On May 2, 1968, Benavidez, of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group, U.S. Army, reached a reconnaissance team under enemy fire. Severely wounded, he carried other soldiers to helicopters, saving the lives of at least eight comrades.

Rudolph R. Riddell, Army, Civil War, entered service from Hamilton, born in Hamilton, buried in Madison Street Cemetery, Hamilton.

Noble Delance Preston, Army, Civil War, entered service in Fulton, Oswego County, born in Madison, cremated, location of remains unknown.

Terrence C. Graves, Marines, Vietnam, born in Texas, buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, Hamilton.

ONONDAGA

John McHugh, Army, Indian Campaigns, entered service in New York City, born in Ireland, lived in

Syracuse, burial location unknown.

James McConnell, Army, Philippine Insurrection, entered service in Michigan, born in Syracuse, buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Robert Howard McCard, Marines, World War II, entered service in New York state, born in Syracuse, buried in Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu.

George Ladd, Army, Civil War, entered service in Camillus, born in Camillus, buried in Bath National Cemetery.

Harry Kline, Army, Civil War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Germany, buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, Syracuse.

John Kiggins, Army, Civil War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Syracuse, buried in Bath National Cemetery.

John Snyders Kenyon, Army, Civil War, entered service in Schenevus, Otsego County, born in Schoharie County, buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Syracuse.

Peter Kappesser, Army, Civil War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Germany, buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Philip Goettel, Army, Civil War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Salina, buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Adelbert Everson, Army, Civil War, entered service in Salina, born in Cicero, buried in Riverside Cemetery, Brewerton.

William Henry Harrison Crosier, Army, Civil War, entered service at Skaneateles, born in Skaneateles, buried in Oakwood Morningside Cemetery, Syracuse.

Albert Adams Clapp, Army, Civil War, entered service in Ohio, born in Pompey, buried in Altadena, Calif.

James Lemeul Carey, Army, Civil War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Jamesville, buried in Carnegie, Pa.

Henry Alanson Barnum, Army, Civil War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Jamesville, buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Syracuse.

Norman F. Potter, Army, Civil War, entered service in Pompey, born in Pompey, buried in Delphi Falls Baptist Church Cemetery.

Irwin Shepard, Army, Civil War, entered service in Michigan, born in Skaneateles, buried in Winona, Minn.

Lester Raymond Stone Jr., Army, Vietnam War, entered service in Syracuse, born in Binghamton, buried in Binghamton.

William Tracy Gardner, Army, Civil War, entered service in Albany, born in Syracuse, buried in Oakwood Morningside Cemetery.

Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright IV, Army, World War II, entered service in Skaneateles, born in Walla Walla, Wash., buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

John Wainwright, Army, Civil War, entered service in Pennsylvania, born in Syracuse, buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Martin Wambsgan, Army, Civil War, entered service in Clyde, Wayne County, born in Germany, buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, Syracuse.

CAYUGA

Samuel P. Kenyon, Army, Civil War, entered service in Augusta, Oneida County, born in Ira, Cayuga County, buried in Richfield Springs.

Louis Lawton, Army, Boxer Rebellion, entered service in Auburn, born in Iowa, buried in Fort Hill Cemetery, Auburn.

George Washington Thompson, Army, Indian Campaigns, entered service in Syracuse, born in Victory, Cayuga County, burial place unknown.

Charles L. Barrell, Army, Civil War, entered service in Michigan, born in Conquest, Cayuga County, buried in Michigan.

Harry Harvey, Army, Civil War, entered service in Rochester, birthplace unknown, died in Cayuga County, buried in Myrtle Hill Cemetery, Syracuse.

Richard Christopher Mangam, Army, Civil War, entered service in Auburn, born in Ireland, buried in Maple Grove

Cemetery, Auburn.

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