

Press Conference: Medal of Honor Ceremony
1 p.m.
Thursday, March 15, 2012
Capitol, Rotunda
Gov. Steve Beshear
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This building is full of memorials.

Portraits of Supreme Court justices upstairs. Statues here in the Rotunda of famous Kentuckians. The Kentucky Women Remembered gallery down the hall. A bust of Colonel Sanders.

Even porcelain miniatures honoring Kentucky's First Ladies.

All of these pay tribute – deservedly – to work performed in the service of others.

But on the most courageous service of all, this building is mostly silent.

When it comes to recognizing our military men and women – especially those who sacrificed their lives for others or showed an unselfish willingness to do so – there is no memorial in this building, this repository of all that Kentuckians revere and respect.

Today, thanks to the efforts of a lot of people, including Rep. Tanya Pullin and Sen. Jack Westwood, we remedy that.

Today, with this bronze plaque, we call attention to Kentucky's 60 Medal of Honor recipients – 59 men and one woman who received America's highest award for valor in action.

This plaque will be displayed permanently on the outside wall of this Rotunda, just inside the main entrance to the building, for all visitors to see.

It's a recognition that is long overdue.

Medal recipients generally prefer the focus to be placed elsewhere.

They didn't seek the Medal, didn't ask for it, don't lobby for it and are usually surprised to receive it.

That's because you neither compete for the Medal nor win it.

You earn it.

You earn it with blood, courage and concern for your fellow soldier that thrusts aside concern for your own safety.

You earn it for performance in conditions that would leave most of us trembling in place.

In a few moments we will hear the stories behind the Medals of Kentucky's five living recipients, three of whom we are privileged to have with us today.

Their actions speak more forcefully than any of our words ever could.

And when you understand that 60 such stories accompany this bronze plaque, then you understand its power and importance.

Their deeds span a 150-year period.

Thinking about those deeds, I feel a range of emotions.

Anguish and grief, at the violence that exacts such a horrible toll on humanity.

Relief, that America and all the world's free peoples have warriors like these to protect us.

Awe, at our recipients' courage and sacrifice.

And pride -- as a Kentuckian, as a military veteran myself, and as governor.

From the early days of the Bluegrass State – in fact, even before Kentucky officially *became* a state – people who live here have embodied a deep tradition of military service, of stepping forward to defend this nation and its ideals.

We've gone wherever that service has taken us – to the trenches on the Western Front, the beaches of France, the rugged terrain of Korea, the jungles of Vietnam, the desert sands of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan.

Our 335,000 living veterans are testament to that history.

So are all those who are currently serving overseas, as well as the men and women we recently welcomed home from Iraq.

And so too are these 60 names.

Every time I pass this memorial I will remember the chilling stories underlying the reason each name is on there.

But I will also feel hope, because the power of our enemies pales in the face of the kind of courage, sacrifice, and dedication to duty demonstrated by these men and woman.

Private Ross ... Private First Class West ... Sgt. First Class Littrell ... Private First Class Jenkins ... and Sgt. Meyer, on behalf of my wife, First Lady Jane Beshear, Lt. Gov. Jerry Abramson and Madeline Abramson, and on behalf of 4.3 million Kentuckians, I say “thank you.”

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