Virginia Medal of Honor Gallery
Beyond the Call of Duty

This gallery is the only place in the Commonwealth where you can learn the history of the brave Virginians who have been awarded the nation’s highest and most prestigious military honor for valor. Of the more than 25 million men and women who have served and sacrificed in our nation’s wars, fewer than 3,600 have received the Medal of Honor. And of those, 50 have been officially attributed to the Commonwealth of Virginia by the Department of Defense.

Each of the Virginia recipients is remembered in this gallery with a plaque that bears the recipient’s full name, hometown, military unit, a description of the recognized action, and the full text of the citation. Also in the gallery are video stations where honorees can be researched, and additional information about the individuals and the events related to their service can be reviewed. Below are a few of Virginia’s Medal of Honor recipients you can learn about in the gallery.

**ROBERT BLAKE**

Robert Blake was born into slavery in Virginia. In June 1862, his owner’s plantation was burned during a Union naval expedition up the Santee River. About 400 slaves from the plantation, including Blake, were taken as contraband onto Union ships. By December 25, 1863, Blake had been transferred to USS Marblehead. While Blake was on the ship’s gun deck, he was knocked down by an exploding Confederate shell. The explosion had killed a powder boy manning one of the guns. Blake had no assigned combat role and could have retreated to relative safety below deck, but he instead chose to take over the powder boy’s duties. The Confederates eventually abandoned their position, leaving a gun behind. For his actions during the firefight, Blake was awarded the Medal of Honor four months later, on April 16, 1864.

The citation for this brave Virginian reads:

“1st Lt. Monteith landed with the initial assault waves on the coast of France under heavy enemy fire. Without regard to his own personal safety he continually moved up and down the beach reorganizing men for further assaults. Completely exposed to the intense fire, 1st Lt. Monteith led the tanks on foot through a minefield and into firing positions. Supervising the defense of his newly won position against repeated vicious counterattacks, he continued to ignore his own personal safety, repeatedly crossing the 200 or 300 yards of open terrain under heavy fire to strengthen links in his defensive chain. When the enemy succeeded in completely surrounding 1st Lt. Monteith and his unit and while leading the fight out of the situation, 1st Lt. Monteith was killed by enemy fire. The courage, gallantry, and intrepid leadership displayed by 1st Lt. Monteith is worthy of emulation.”

**JAMES GARDINER**

James Gardiner worked as an oysterman before enlisting in the Union Army from Yorktown, Virginia, on September 15, 1863. He joined Company I of the 36th Regiment United States Colored Troops as a private. At the Battle of Chaffin’s Farm, Virginia, on September 29, 1864, Gardiner’s regiment was among a division of black troops assigned to attack the Confederate defenses at New Market Heights. The attack was met with intense Confederate fire; over half of the black troops were killed, captured, or wounded. The day after the battle, Gardiner was promoted to sergeant. Several months later and three days before the end of the war, on April 6, 1865, he was issued the Medal of Honor for his actions at Chaffin’s Farm.

**JIMMIE W. MONTEITH JR.**

First Lieutenant Jimmie W. Monteith Jr.’s headstone at Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, Basse-Normandie, France.

The citation for this brave Virginian reads:

“1st Lt. Monteith landed with the initial assault waves on the coast of France under heavy enemy fire. Without regard to his own personal safety he continually moved up and down the beach reorganizing men for further assaults. Completely exposed to the intense fire, 1st Lt. Monteith led the tanks on foot through a minefield and into firing positions. Supervising the defense of his newly won position against repeated vicious counterattacks, he continued to ignore his own personal safety, repeatedly crossing the 200 or 300 yards of open terrain under heavy fire to strengthen links in his defensive chain. When the enemy succeeded in completely surrounding 1st Lt. Monteith and his unit and while leading the fight out of the situation, 1st Lt. Monteith was killed by enemy fire. The courage, gallantry, and intrepid leadership displayed by 1st Lt. Monteith is worthy of emulation.”
Rock Solid Support from Southside Virginia

A few months ago, before I joined the Foundation, Joyce Ellen French and Ted Daniel announced the Southside Initiative. They approached other like-minded citizens, businesses, and local governments in Southside Virginia about working together to show the Commonwealth, and the country, how important their area has been in shaping our nation's history through military service and sacrifice. Their efforts have resulted in close to $100,000 in gifts and grants to the Virginia War Memorial Foundation in memory and in honor of those brave souls whose names are etched on the walls of the Shrine of Memory.

And a rugged piece of granite from Mecklenburg County, hauled to the Memorial by a crew from J.A. Barker Construction, Inc. now anchors the Walkway of Honor. It is support like this, from areas all over the state and country, which helps us in our mission to honor veterans, preserve history, educate our youth, and inspire patriotism in all.

The Mighty Pen Project

Now in its seventh year, our Mighty Pen Project continues to offer intensive writing classes to help and encourage veterans and their loved ones to commit to paper their memories and reflections, together forming a living documentary of American military service.

The Virginia War Memorial, in partnership with the Mighty Pen Project and Firehouse Theatre of Richmond, is taking part in another groundbreaking initiative for military veterans. Opening this September, four one-act plays written by Virginia veterans will be professionally produced and staged performances of their experiences of combat and the home front.

The Veterans’ Art Gallery

Creative expression shaped by military service

This space is a natural extension of our efforts to provide veterans a safe place, free from judgment and convention, to tell their stories in their own words and images. Currently on view; stunning artwork in a variety of mediums from Mike Fox, Diana de Avila, Pamela Corwin, Bernie Donato, Dennis Hicks, and Saxon Martinez. Our next art show opens June 1, 2020.

SACRED SCENES: AMERICAN PARKS AND BATTLEFIELDS

The Photography of Frank Lee Ruggles and Amanda Ransome

Their individual work captures the beauty and majesty of some of America’s most hallowed spaces: national parks and national battlefields. Together, their photography paints a picture of places that are purely American with a history that connects us all, and must be protected.

Walkway of Honor Southside Initiative Donors

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A different perspective on history. (anaglyphs) give visitors a images converted to 3D images stereoscopic images, and 2D to the Global War on Terrorism, from the American Civil War Military-themed photography Military Photography: (We also need a larger whiteboard) Space for Education Expanded and Improved An Added Dimension veterans organizations. Learning Institute, retirement communities, and school groups but also adult learners in the Lifelong Learning Institute, retirement communities, and veterans organizations. ■

ALSO NEW — In the C. Kenneth Wright Pavilion

Expanded and Improved Space for Education (We also need a larger whiteboard)

A new distance-learning classroom will allow us to stream our classroom programs and teacher education programs in real time. On-site and off-site teacher institutes continue to be of significant importance to our educators who want professional development opportunities as well as curriculum content. Our efforts continue to reach not only traditional school groups but also adult learners in the Lifelong Learning Institute, retirement communities, and veterans organizations. ■

FROM THE MEMORIAL DIRECTOR

The Opening Was Grand

It was with a combined sense of excitement and relief that we dedicated the new Shrine of Memory expansion and opened the C. Kenneth Wright Pavilion here at the Virginia War Memorial on 29 February. This project was over four years in the making, but the families of those honored in the Shrine of Memory — Global War on Terrorism and Beyond — have waited much longer to see their loved ones honored. Now, we will be able to use this world-class facility to honor their memory and make a real impact in the Commonwealth in terms of educational programming, events, and other exciting initiatives. As director of the War Memorial, I have never been prouder of what we have accomplished or more enthusiastic about what the future holds. This expansion is the springboard that will launch us into a new era of discovery, identifying the many ways that we can be the greatest living memorial possible and continue to set the standard for the nation. With the continued support from our state and proud, committed patriots, we will prove over and over just how much Virginia values those sacrifices made by its sons and daughters, and how dedicated we are to ensuring that future generations understand and appreciate those sacrifices. These are exciting times at the Virginia War Memorial, and I look forward to seeing you here soon and having you join our mission.

Dr. Clay Mountcastle
Director
Virginia War Memorial

OUR MISSION
To honor veterans, preserve history, educate youth, and inspire patriotism in all.

OUR VISION
Advancing knowledge of history and cultural awareness throughout the Commonwealth and beyond by sharing and preserving veterans’ personal stories and America’s military past.
There’s a reason Venture Richmond has named the Virginia War Memorial one of the top ten best places in Downtown Richmond to photograph and be photographed. Consider the views, the interiors, and the remarkable mission of this stunning facility. Open spaces or quiet places — guests will long remember this location. Meeting amenities and plentiful parking are among the other features that make the War Memorial a perfect place to rent for a special event or celebration.

For more information, contact Kerrie Arcand at karcand@vawarmemorial.org or call (804) 786-2176.

For the latest event details, visit VaWarMemorial.org or call (804) 786-2060.