

FEATURE STORY

WWII Tennessee Heroes

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Considering all the people who fought in WWII there are bound to be some stories that are miraculous but have been overshadowed or unpublished due to one extremity or another. Many heroic acts of men from Tennessee have gone unseen or overlooked. These men have risked their lives for their country and, though some have perished, all of them deserve to be known and recognized for the honor they have brought their family and their country.

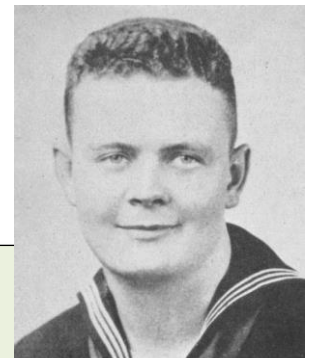
Research from *Heroes of World War II* by Edward F. Murphy
Random House Publishing Group, 1990, USA

**RAYMOND H. COOLEY:
25TH INFANTRY DIVISION
FOUGHT IN LUZON ON FEBRUARY 24, 1945**

On February 24, 1945, while attacking a camouflaged trench line near Lumboy, Cooley's squad went to ground under a withering fire from several Japanese machine guns. Cooley took it upon himself to crawl up to one machine gun, where he threw a hand grenade at the enemy.

Inspired by his boldness and success, Cooley's squad moved up to join him in the attack on the second machine gun nest. He pulled the pin on a grenade. At that instant, six Japanese burst from hiding places. In seconds, they had flung themselves at Cooley's squad, so he couldn't throw his grenade he tucked the armed grenade into his stomach and stepped away.

Hospitalized back in the states, Cooley had recovered sufficiently to receive his medal of honor on August 23, 1945. (Murphy pg 270-271)



**JOHN H. WILLIS:
5TH MARINE DIVISION
FOUGHT IN IWO JIMA ON FEBRUARY 28, 1945**

All day he scrambled from one wounded marine to another. He caught a hunk of shrapnel in the shoulder and was ordered off the hill. When he heard casualties had been overlooked during the pull-back Willis left the aid station to bring them in. Halfway back, he came upon a badly wounded marine lying in a shell hole. There was time to jab a rifle, bayonet first, into the ground and rig a bottle plasma to its stock. The next second a grenade dropped in the hole. Willis fielded the misleading and hurled it back towards the enemy. 7 more followed in quick successions. He tossed all 7 but the 9th one exploded in his hand killing him instantly. (Murphy pg 284)

**CHARLES L. MCGAHA:
25TH INFANTRY DIVISION
FOUGHT IN LUZON ON FEBRUARY 7, 1945**

One of McGaha's men fell wounded about 40 yards across an open rice paddy. The man screamed for a medic but no one moved. There's was too much firing. It was sure suicide to go after him but McGaha could no longer stand the man's screaming. A Japanese bullet ploughed a furrow down his arm, but he ignored it, carrying the man back to an aid station. Rather ting to have his arm tended to, McGaha returned to the ditch. There he found his platoon leader seriously wounded. McGaha assumed command of the platoon. While directing his men's fire against the Japanese, he saw a little party carrying a casualty to the rear. Just as he reached them a mortar shell exploded in their midst, killing two of the party, and tearing a gaping hole in his shoulder.

Though suffering great pain, McGaha picked up the remaining man and carried him to cover. Back to the ditch, McGaha received an order to pull his men back to give them protection. McGaha deliberately exposed himself to the enemy, drawing their fire so the platoon could withdraw. After retiring in 1961, McGaha became a successful business man. Sadly in an apparent robbery attempt, an assailant stabbed him 40 times, leaving him to bleed to death.

<https://etvma.org/veterans/charles-l-mcgaha-12230/>

(Murphy pg 259-261)

**TROY McGRILL:
-1ST CAVALRY DIVISION
-FOUGHT IN THE LOS NEGROS,
ADMIRALTY ISLANDS ON MARCH 4TH, 1944**

McGrill's machine gun position bore the brunt of one local attack. He and his 8 man squad faced 200 enemy soldiers. They fought frantically until McGrill and only one other man remained. McGrill ordered that man to fall back, then returned to his machine gun. He blazed away, dropping enemy soldiers left and right, until he ran out of ammo. With the enemy sweeping down on him, McGrill grabbed an M-1 and rose out of his foxhole. He bashed the Japanese with the rifle until they overwhelmed him and killed him. (Murphy pg 153)



**PAUL B. HUFF
509TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
FOUGHT IN REGIMENT ITALY ON FEBRUARY 8, 1944**

Huff volunteered to lead a 6 man patrol with the mission of determining with the location and strength of an enemy unit which was delivering fire on the exposed right flank of his company. Realizing the danger confronting his patrol, he advanced alone under deadly fire through a minefield and arrived at a point within 75 yards of the nearest machine gun position. Under direct fire from the rear machine gun, he crawled the remaining 75 yards to the closest emplacement, killed the crew with his submachine gun and destroyed the gun. Still under concentrated fire, he returned to his patrol and led his men to safety.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_B._Huff

(Murphy pg 338)

**VERNON McGARITY:
99TH INFANTRY DIVISION
FOUGHT IN BELGIUM ON DECEMBER 16,
1944**

He was painfully wounded in an artillery barrage that preceded the powerful counteroffensive launched by the Germans near Krinkelt, Belgium, on the morning of December 16, 1944. He made his way to an aid station where he received treatment but refused to be evacuated. He chose to return to hard pressing men instead. So tenaciously did these men fight on orders to stand firm at all costs that they could not be dislodged despite murderous enemy fire and the breakdown of their of their communications. During the day, McGarity rescued 1 of his friends, who had been wounded in a forward position.

Throughout the night, he exhorted his comrades to repulse the enemy's infiltration. He braved heavy fire to run an advantageous position, where he immobilized the enemy's lead tank with a round from a rocket launcher. He rescued, under heavy fire, another American. When ammo began to run low, he braved a concentration of hostile fire to replenish his unit's supply by circuitous route. The enemy managed to emplacement a machine gun to the rear and flank of the squad's position, cutting off the only escape route. Unhesitatingly McGarity took it upon himself to destroy this menace single handed.

He left cover, and while under steady fire from the enemy, killed or wounded all the hostile gunners with deadly accurate rifle fire and prevented all attempts to re-man the gun. Only when the squad's last round had been fired was the enemy able to advance and capture the intrepid leader and his men.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernon_McGarity

(Murphy pg 342)



**ELBERT L. KINSER:
-1ST MARINE DIVISION
-FOUGHT ON OKINAWA IN MAY 4, 1945**

Quick to act when a Japanese grenade landed in the immediate vicinity, Kinser unhesitatingly threw himself on a deadly missile, absorbing the full charge of the shattering explosion in his own body and thereby protecting his men from serious injury and possible death.

<https://etvma.org/veterans/elbert-l-kinser-8385/>

(Murphy pg 340)

Image: Elbert L. Kinser, USMC, Medal of Honor recipient; killed in action during World War II; photo from official Marine Corps biography. The image is in the public domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kinser_EL.jpg

**CHARLES H. COOLIDGE
36TH INFANTRY DIVISION
FOUGHT IN FRANCE ON OCTOBER 24- 27,
1944**

Under his able leadership the inexperienced men repulsed repeated attacks throughout October 25 and 26. On October 27, a German infantry, with by 2 tanks, made a determined attack on the position and swept the area with small arms, machine guns, and tank fire. Coming so close that the German commander stood up and told Coolidge, in excellent English, to surrender. "Sorry, Mac, you'll have to come and get me," Coolidge told him. With all the hand grenades he could carry, he crawled forward and inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing enemy.

<http://www.mohconvention.com/tn-recipient/22/charles-henry-coolidge/>

(Murphy pg 333)

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