

# **‘These Two Gentlemen are Now Forever in Our History’**

## **A VFW Post in Alabama spearheaded a project to honor two local Medal of Honor recipients by naming a portion of US Highway 31 after them**

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In December 2020, one of Alabama’s best-kept secrets was brought to light when signs honoring Escambia County’s two Medal of Honor recipients were unveiled.

Held at the Atmore City Hall Auditorium in Atmore, Alabama, the unveiling and dedication revealed the signs, to be placed along U.S. Highway 31, as part of joint resolutions by the Alabama State Legislature to commemorate two of its own sons.

These signs commemorated the deeds of Army Cpl. Sidney E. Manning and Army Sgt. William Wayne Seay, who earned the awards 50 years apart. Manning’s heroism came in 1918 during World War I, while Seay earned his medal during the Vietnam War in 1968.

For their heroics, a portion of the highway between Atmore and Flomaton, Alabama, is now named the Cpl. Sidney Manning Memorial Highway, while a segment of the federal thoroughfare between Brewton, Alabama, and Flomaton is named the Sgt. William Wayne Seay Memorial Highway.

Among the many who attended the unveiling was Billy Gates, commander of VFW Post 7016 in Atmore. Gates said he was among those who were unaware the county had two individuals who earned the country’s highest award for valor under fire.

“I’m ashamed to say that I’ve been in Escambia County since about 1970, and until it was brought to my attention about two-and-a-half years ago, I didn’t know we had two Medal of Honor recipients in the county,” Gates said. “I found out that not anybody else in Escambia County knew, either. That is shameful, but that is what’s happening to patriotism today.”

Gates added that Bobby Lanier, the Post’s membership committee chair, brought the fact to

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his attention, then worked tirelessly to raise the funds and arrange the placement of the highway signage.

The Post commander said most of the funding for the signs — about \$7,000 — came from small donations, but he noted there were some who made larger contributions to the project. Gates cited Southern Pine Electric Cooperative, Escambia County Historical Society, Harvey Casen, Wanda Sorenson, Ronald Hendricks, Shawn Rounsavall and Sandy Hardee as major donors.

Atmore Mayor Jim Staff delivered brief remarks during the program, as did Flomaton Mayor Dewey Bondurant and Breton Mayor Yank Lovelace, before Alan Bowser, commander of the VFW Department of Alabama, gave his keynote address.

Bowser, an Army veteran, said there is a bond and a brotherhood that is formed by those who have been in combat. He added that Manning and Seay personified the word “hero,” which he noted is much overused today.

“Doing what you’re doing in this community today is part of that bond, a part of the history of America,” Bowser said. “These two gentlemen are now forever in our history. People use the word ‘hero’ nowadays, and it is distorted. These two men didn’t wear a mask; they didn’t wear capes. They weren’t professional football players, basketball players or baseball players. They were soldiers. These two gentlemen did the ultimate in what we are supposed to do — keep each other safe and continue the mission.”

Bowser then provided a brief account of the actions that made the two local men worthy of the Medal of Honor. This was followed by Alabama State Rep. Alan Baker, who talked about the fundraising effort that made the roadway renaming project a reality.

Following the speeches, family members of each MOH recipient posed for photos with a facsimile of their respective honoree’s commemorative sign. This included Manning’s family, who was represented by his granddaughter and his great-grandson. The Seay family, traveling from Indiana for the ceremony, was represented by the medal recipient’s brother, William Steve Seay, as well as his sister, two nephews and nieces, respectively.

The unveiling ceremony concluded with Alabama State Sen. Greg Albritton, who read the joint resolutions he introduced in the state senate that eventually received approval from both of the state’s legislative bodies.

*This article is featured in the 2023 August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by Don Fletcher. Fletcher is a contributing writer and VFW Post 7016 member in Atmore, Alabama. He also works as a reporter for his hometown newspaper, the Atmore News.*