

# Staff Sergeant Watkins honored as Medal of Honor recipient

**BY WAYNE MORTON**  
FOR THE JOURNAL

WEST UNION — Just as a small platoon had gathered on a hillside in Korea in 1952 to retake an enemy stronghold, a group of about 20 family, friends, and Marines gathered on a wind-swept hillside at the Wolf Stake Baptist Church cemetery Monday to honor Oconee's County's Lewis G. Watkins, who gave his life for his men that day in a far-away land.

Marine Staff Sergeant Watkins, called "Slim" by his buddies, served as platoon sergeant of the 3rd Battalion 7th Marines during the Korean War. His selfless act of bravery that day saved his platoon and earned him a place in history as the only Oconee County recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

According to the citation that accompanied the medal, which is now on display at the Patriots' Hall Veteran Museum in Walhalla, the Marine platoon had been in an enemy firefight and Watkins was wounded but still in command of his troops.

The unit was assigned to retake an enemy outpost, and in the battle a grenade was lobbed into the American platoon.

Watkins instinctively shoved his men aside to safety and grabbed the grenade to throw it back. However, the deadly bomb blew up in his hand. His remains were never found.

The fallen Marine was honored on National Medal of Honor Day, which was designated by Congress to honor recipients of the military's highest honor.



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**Past Commander Jim Stone, left, and Tim Callahan of the 1131st Detachment of the Marine Corps League salute over the memorial for Lewis G. Watkins, Oconee County's only Medal of Honor recipient.**

"We are here to honor our hero," said Jim Stone, past Commander of the 1131st Lewis G. Watkins Detachment of the Marine Corps League.

Detachment chaplain Ray Ramsburg read Psalm 91 and said the passage was read daily during World War I by the 91st Infantry in combat.

"As a result, their casualties were few," he said.

"Lewis is with our Lord," Ramsburg said.

"The recipients of this highest decoration entered their last day all the same, not knowing what lay ahead, but just did their job

they were trained to do while serving and defending our great country."

Joyce Brickett and Jane Paradise, members of the Detachment's Ladies Auxiliary, Tim Callahan and Stone placed a large wreath each on the memorial for Watkins.

A 21-gun salute by the Detachment's Honor Guard followed.

Taps was sounded as Marines stood at attention and others looked on.

"It is a significant day as we honor Lewis' memory and give tribute to his heroic actions and ultimate sacrifice for his country," Stone said.