

Something amazing happened in Bourbon, Missouri last week. Two weeks prior to Memorial Day, a group of veterans and family members gathered at American Legion Post #81 in Bourbon to dedicate their new building. And on the program was a woman named Sheila Wood.

I started working with Sheila in September of last year to get her cousin, 2nd Lieutenant Dean Gilroy Murphy, the Purple Heart he earned when he was injured at Iwo Jima 67 years ago. His story is a definitive one of military service during World War II, only with a tragic end. From Camp Pendleton in California, Lieutenant Murphy shipped out on November 12, 1944. He died on April 7, 1945, during the turning-point battle of the Pacific Theater in World War II, twenty days before he would have turned 21 years old.

The family never claimed Lieutenant Murphy's Purple Heart until cousin Sheila took on the project last September. We had the medal from the Department of Defense by December.

Last week, as we dedicated the American Legion Post in Bourbon, the Murphy family bestowed Lieutenant Murphy's Purple Heart on the Post. They entrusted it to the American Legion with the understanding that the medal would be displayed so that Lieutenant Murphy would not be forgotten, as the award itself had been forgotten, for so long.

Ceremonies involving our veterans and their belated awards are always moving and always special, but this one was especially wonderful. So many American heroes are overlooked because of their modesty. So many tales of bravery and sacrifice are never passed on. So many honors and awards end up in drawers and lock boxes when they should be shared. Yet, these virtues cannot survive from one generation to the next unless we talk about them.

Blood, sweat and tears are contained in each Purple Heart awarded by our country. The medal represents an incredible cost in human terms to entire families. Without Americans who are willing to sacrifice for our nation and our freedoms, however, we would all be lost. So we must know these stories and we must remember them.

Since the Purple Heart was established in 1932, it has honored the bravery and the pain

endured by exceptional men and women in the service of our country. For 80 years, these medals have been bestowed on patriots and heroes. Purple Hearts are not recommended; they are earned. It is the oldest military award still given to U.S. servicemembers.

And each Purple Heart has its own story. They are attached to veterans who put our country before themselves, and the circumstances of their sacrifices teach us a lot about the cost of the freedoms we treasure as Americans. Now, Lieutenant Murphy's story can be told and remembered.

His is a Purple Heart for all of Missouri.

I'm so glad to tell his story, to honor his service and to thank his family for making such a selfless gift to their community.