



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tom Libous

Joe Ceurter

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Award: Veterans' Hall of Fame

Year: 2010

When Joe Ceurter of Berkshire was a young soldier serving in the US Army's occupation force in Japan after World War II he was suddenly thrust into the unexpected and bloody conflict today known as the Korean War. In one brutal engagement with the Communist North Korean army a mortar shell exploded near Joe, knocking him unconscious. Thinking he was dead, his unit was forced to retreat as the position was being overrun by the enemy. Joe regained consciousness as he was being pummeled by the rifle butt of an enemy soldier and he quickly leveled his rifle to kill his attacker. Joe continued firing on the enemy soldiers, eventually forcing them to retreat.

Surviving the Korean War, Joe Ceurter was awarded two Silver Star medals, two Bronze Stars and Five Purple Hearts for his many heroic deeds in the service of America. Joe Ceurter came back home after the war to work on his family farm but he never stopped serving America and the cause of his fellow veterans. Joe became a member of and later the Post Commander of Owego's Veterans of Foreign Wars Glenn A. Warner Post 1371 where for many years he has been an integral member of the VFW Honor Guard which provides ceremonial services at the burials of fallen veterans.

Joe Ceurter's service with the VFW Honor Guard today includes meeting the returning remains at the Binghamton Regional Airport of soldiers who have fallen in Iraq and Afghanistan to escort them on their final trips home for burial. In April, 2009 Joe's regular service with the VFW Honor Guard gave him the opportunity to pay special tribute to a fellow veteran of the Korean War. On November 1st, 1950 US Army Sgt. Dougall H. Espy's unit was attacked and overrun by Communist Chinese forces near Unsan, Korea. Sgt. Espy was listed as missing and presumed dead and his body remained there until 1994 when the North Korean government returned his and other remains to the US Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory where his remains were later positively identified.

Joe Ceurter was instrumental in organizing a Memorial Honor Guard consisting of hundreds of fellow veterans and patriotic citizens to line the streets of Elmira Heights from the church holding Sgt. Espy's funeral to the Woodlawn National Cemetery, which became his final resting place. Joe Ceurter's willingness to stand for hours in a cold rain once again demonstrated his selfless dedication to the honor and respect for America and its veterans and fallen heroes. At a young 83 years old, Joseph W. Ceurter of Berkshire participates daily in activities at his VFW Post 1371 and serves today's generation of veterans by organizing the purchase and delivery of gift packages to active duty members of the US Armed Forces serving in overseas posts, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. Joseph W. Ceurter never forgets his country or his fellow veterans and his daily life is filled with the highest

traditions of the New York State Veterans Hall of Fame.