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Medal recipient remembered

Veterans group gathers to raise money for War Memorial maintenance

By [Fred Brown](#)

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Photos by Chad Greene

A wreath is laid in honor of 1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman by his daughter, Frances Bonnyman Evans, third from left, and Marine Corps League Det. 924 Commandant Virgil Young, second from left, during the East Memorial Association Medal of Honor Evening on Monday at the War Memorial in World's Fair Park.



Evans, left, and Young listen to taps Monday at the ETVMA ceremony.

One day, Clay Bonnyman Evans hopes to find the remains of his heroic grandfather - 1st Lt. Alexander "Sandy" Bonnyman, a World War II Medal of Honor winner - and then with the family's permission return him home to Knoxville.

On Monday night, Evans, 49, related portions of his grandfather's World War II history at the Foundry where about 140 people gathered for the first East Tennessee Veterans Memorial Association Medal of Honor Evening. The fundraising event sponsored by ETVMA was to help the organization maintain the War Memorial on World's Fair Park, which the ETVMA dedicated Nov. 15, 2008.

The memorial is a public plaza with a formal arrangement of granite pillars bearing the names of 6,172 names of military personnel from 35 East Tennessee counties who died in military service during conflicts since World War I.

John Romeiser, ETVMA president, said the organization plans to honor all 14 of Tennessee's Medal of Honor winners with yearly events.

Joining Evans at the event was his mother, Frances Bonnyman Evans of Denver. She was 9 years old when her father was killed and she received the Medal of Honor for the Bonnyman family when she was 12 from then-Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. The posthumous presentation of the nation's highest military award was held in 1947 in Washington.

Bonnyman joined the U.S. Marine Corps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The 33-year-old Bonnyman was killed Nov. 22, 1943, on Tarawa Atoll's Betio Island.

Leading a group of Marines with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Bonnyman dashed up a sandy mound to a heavily fortified bombproof shelter. In his first attempt to clear the bunker he killed several Japanese soldiers, until he and the four-man team he led exhausted their ammunition.

On Bonnyman's second trip up the dune, he flushed 100 or so Japanese from the concrete-reinforced strongpoint. He was killed at the mouth of the bunker.

Clay Evans, who said he had heard stories about his grandfather all of his life, is a journalist in Niwot, Colo., and is writing a book about Bonnyman and his Medal of Honor. He visited Tarawa last year and showed many of the photos from his trip in his presentation before the ETVMA crowd.

His grandfather's body was never recovered, despite many efforts to find him and an estimated 200 other Marines who died on the island but have not been found.

In a ceremony after the dinner at the Foundry, Frances Evans laid a wreath at the front of the memorial in honor of her father.

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