

Heart: 400 medals returned

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Once the realization that his mission was accomplished sank in, so did something else: He didn't know where the medal was in his house.

Easter was on April 16, and the medal was due to Purple Hearts Reunited on May 18, so he and a friend, Brad Talent, turned his house upside-down looking for it.

"I always kept it close to my heart, but the Army moved me from Salem to Monmouth," Coady said, explaining how it got misplaced. "I'm getting calls from back East: 'Have you found it yet?'"

"Still looking," he responds.

On May 17, as full-scale panic set in, Talent approached Coady with a DVD case.

"It says Mount St. Helens, May 18," Coady said.

At first, he thought his friend was teasing him about the date on the DVD, because the deadline was that day. But then something spooky happened.

"He opens it up," Coady said. "It's in there."

Coady sent it via FedEx and traveled to New York for a Purple Hearts Reunited ceremony in August during which the medal was presented to Ridgeway.



Jack Kightlinger, left, with friend Floyd Swift while serving in the U.S. Army.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN COADY /for Itemizer-Observer

"It gives you goose-bumps," he said of the ceremony. "It was honorable."

Coady was interviewed several times and bought his first suit for an appearance on Fox & Friends before the ceremony. During that segment, Ridgeway said Coady is now part of the Kightlinger family.

A new mission

Purple Hearts Reunited

has returned more than 400 lost medals to veterans or their families. Coady said Purple Hearts are found all over — at thrift stores, at garage sales or are long-forgotten in people's houses.

Now retired, he's enlisted in spreading the word that the medals can — and should — be returned.

"Now I want to go to antique stores and find these

medals. That's my mission, I think," Coady said. "It's such a good thing. It's so important. So important. People don't realize. They could look in their attics and dresser drawers and be surprised."

For more information on returning a Purple Heart or finding a lost medal, go to www.purpleheartsreunited.org.

Fires: Wildfires humbling for local firefighter crews

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Firefighters were expected to return on Tuesday. Welsh said weather conditions late last week were improving.

"Our firefighters said temperatures are much cooler and there hasn't been much wind," Welsh said. "The winds have been cooperative."

Stange said that the Eagle Creek fire has been humbling.

"It's an impressive jump over the Columbia (River)," he said. "In the Northwest, there is not a bigger fire break, having the river and the freeways. We're not going to replicate anything that big. So if it can make it over that, it's a humbling thought."

The Polk-Yamhill task force is one of 22 across the state working on the wildfires.

Dallas' assistance went further than sending crews and equipment. The department also assisted with training the week of Sept. 2 for National Guard units who are responding to fires across the state.

"It was really exciting to have our firefighters involved in training the National guard," Welsh said. "They trained 150 National Guardsmen that weekend."

For all the assistance Dallas is sending to fires across the state during what Welsh calls "a terrible fire season," Dallas hasn't neglected their main mission. She said having paid firefighters during fire season has enabled the department to lend a hand elsewhere.

"We still have resources available here," Welsh said. "We have two paid firefighters. They will be working until the other crew returns. We haven't left our area unprotected at all."

Kissell said the firefighters are in good spirits.

"Here's the thing about firefighters: We enjoy doing what we do," he said. "Out here, we're face to face with a lot of citizens. We're trying to alleviate their fears. It's very grueling work for long hours every day, but we're doing something that we love and to make the situation better. Ultimately, we'd prefer not to be here, because that means there's no fire affecting the community."

For more information: polkio.com.

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