

VFW Post Honors Civil War Soldier

Story showcases finding redemption through action

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VFW Post 9594 in upstate New York believes in redemption through action. For this reason, it held a ceremony acknowledging Civil War soldier Peter Van Hoesen as a Medal of Honor recipient – despite deserting his regiment and later re-enlisting under another man’s name.

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society contacted the Ravena, N.Y., Post in August to inform them of Van Hoesen’s Medal of Honor status, according to Post Commander Trip Powell. This prompted the Post to renovate Van Hoesen’s grave site and “pay for a



monument that reflected all of his service.”

Powell, a 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran, said part of the reason the Post agreed to mark the grave was to show how Van Hoesen’s situation is still relevant today. Veterans currently grapple with physical and mental difficulties, according to Powell, but “never get a second chance in society.”

“The fact of the matter is, this is a guy who made a bad decision,” Powell said. “We’re not discounting the fact that he was a deserter. That’s clear. He admitted it.”

Van Hoesen made a mistake, Powell said, but “did his best to try to resurrect that.”

Powell said Van Hoesen, born in Coeymans, N.Y., enlisted with the 18th New York State Volunteer Infantry Regiment in 1861 and was involved in the First Battle of Bull Run.

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Roughly one year and a few months later, Van Hoesen deserted, along with a first sergeant and eight others.

“We think he thought he enlisted for one year,” Powell said. “He, in fact, enlisted for two years because it was pretty common that people couldn’t read and write.”

Upon returning home, he was arrested for desertion, but escaped and made his way 120 miles down the Hudson River to New York City, according to Powell. It was there he met a man named James Sullivan, who “had made a deal to join the 8th Connecticut Inf. Regt. and had taken a bounty to do so,” according to Powell.

“[Sullivan] talked Van Hoesen into taking the \$300 and going in his place,” Powell said.

Under the guise of Sullivan, Van Hoesen served on the USS Agawam and received the Medal of Honor for his bravery during an attempt to blow up Fort Fisher, a Confederate site in North Carolina.

Powell said Post 9594 received “great support” from the community, which included a Civil War re-enactment group and an active-duty naval color guard at the dedication.

By [Kari Williams](#)