

TWO MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS IN THE BLACK RANGE

Stephen Siegfried

An earlier version of this article appeared in the Silver City Daily Press where Steve Siegfried was a staff writer. It followed ceremonies in October 1999, dedicating cenotaphs placed by the National Congressional Medal of Honor Society for two medal recipients, one at the Kingston cemetery and one in Hillsboro. We are grateful to Steve for resurrecting and sharing this piece. Since the first writing, the internet has made accessible some new facts which cast some elements of the story in a somewhat different light. The text has been edited to reflect that more recent information. –Ed.

After the late summer rains, as is usual this time of year [fall], the cemeteries in the Black Range communities of Kingston and Hillsboro have gone to flowers. Somewhere amid the wild asters, daisies and sunflowers, beneath one mound of rocks or another, lie the remains of the last of New Mexico's Medal of Honor recipients to be honored in a public ceremony.

The actual graves of James McNally and Eben Stanley have not been located—McNally in Kingston, Stanley in Hillsboro—nor is it likely they will ever be found. Nevertheless, McNally and Stanley were honored by the Medal of Honor Society in special ceremonies on Saturday, October 16, 1999 — a final connection for two men who lived parallel, but in other ways, very different lives.

Brig. Gen. Michael Cody, state project coordinator of America Discovers Her Hometown Medal of Honor Heroes, spent 12 years trying to locate the missing graves. It was a search that Cody didn't undertake alone.

Students in Western New Mexico University professor Dale Giese's Southwestern history classes looked through Sierra County archives for any reference to Stanley or McNally — a task made all the more difficult because of a courthouse fire that destroyed county records. In the sketchy records, students were able to identify the cemeteries where the two men were buried. But in the graveyards of old crosses and headstones, some destroyed by fire, others made illegible by the elements and the passage of time, no one has found the actual burial sites of Stanley and McNally. [As it turns out, McNally's grave is actually in Los Angeles, not in Kingston. Not long before his death, he was transferred from Kingston to the Sawtelle Veterans Home in Los Angeles, where he died and was buried in the Los Angeles National Cemetery.¹]

With the placement of the 5-foot-tall limestone monuments that traditionally mark the graves of Medal of Honor recipients, Cody and Giese said, their search for the graves ended. During his research, Cody was first struck by the parallels in the lives of the two men — then, later, by the contrasts.



McNally's tombstone in Los Angeles. The inscription reads:

1ST. Sgt.
Jas. McNally
CO. E.
3 U.S. INF.

And the stone below:
MEDAL OF HONOR
INDIAN WARS
1ST. Sgt. CO. E.
8 U.S. CAVALRY

¹ https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/wm114V1_James_McNally_Los_Angeles_CA. The Veterans Administration has also confirmed that McNally is buried in Los Angeles: see Medal of Honor Historical Society of the United States updates, <https://www.mohhsus.com/updates>.

Each man, at one time, served in the 3rd U. S. Cavalry Regiment. Each was awarded the Medal of Honor, one for “gallantry,” the other for “bravery.” Each, in November 1904, and not 15 miles apart, died within five days of the other: Stanley on November 19 and McNally on November 26 [except as to the location, see the new information reported above]. And, of course, and as the final thread, there is the matter of the unmarked graves and the ceremonies that took place on the same day in the Black Range sister communities of Hillsboro and Kingston. But, as Cody discovered during his research, McNally and Stanley were two very different men.



The monument for Eben Stanley in the southeast corner of the Hillsboro Cemetery. Photo Joe Britton.

Stanley was born in Decatur County, Iowa in February 1844. As a soldier, he was charged with kidnapping for running off with the 14-year-old daughter of an Army sergeant. Those charges were later dropped when he agreed to marry the girl.

After his military discharge, Stanley continued to serve as a scout. In an account of Al Sieber, Chief of Scouts during the Apache Wars, it is reported that Stanley became “an outstanding guide and scout,” operating out of Fort Apache.²

The Medal of Honor citation given to Stanley, dated April 12, 1875, reads as follows: “The President of the United States of America [Ulysses S. Grant], in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private Eben Stanley, United States Army, for gallantry in action on March 25 & 27, 1873, while serving with Company A, 5th U.S. Cavalry, in action at Turret Mountain, Arizona Territory.”³ Cody explained, “Turret Mountain was a decisive battle that ended the Indian Wars in Arizona.” The battle was won after Indian scouts and cavalymen at night scaled what had been regarded as an impregnable Apache stronghold. Giese has a letter Stanley wrote May 18, 1875, from Fort Apache, acknowledging receipt of the medal.

Later, while facing 11 indictments in the Arizona territory for alleged depredations while riding with the Clanton Gang, Stanley had good reason to look for a new place to settle, which is how he ended up in Hillsboro. “(The Arizona courts) weren’t sure they could get convictions. They gave him 30 days to get out of the territory,” Cody said.

No such offer was tendered to Ike Clanton’s brother, Phin. Indicted 16 times and facing trial, he signed over to his sister Mary — who had become Stanley’s third wife — all of his cattle. In Hillsboro, Eben and Mary Stanley used the money from the sale of the cattle to go into the hotel business. “They must have known each other,” Cody said of Stanley and McNally. “Stanley operated two hotels in Hillsboro, and McNally must have stayed there from time to time.”⁴

² Dan Thrapp, *Al Sieber, Chief of Scouts* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), p. 153.

³ <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/687>.

⁴ In a death notice in the *Sierra County Advocate*, Stanley was remembered as “a pioneer of New Mexico and Arizona during the exciting days of Indian warfare. He was a man of rare intelligence and education and had been a resident of this county for a good many years.” The fact that there is not a similar notice for McNally

But while Stanley was somewhat of a womanizer who lived a step ahead of the law, McNally lived a quiet life after his days in the cavalry. Cody found no record that McNally married. “He did a little ranching, but primarily mining. He lived in Kingston from the time he got out of the military until he died,” Cody said.



The monument for James McNally in the southwest corner of the Kingston Cemetery. Photo Joe Britton.

McNally was born in County Monaghan, Ireland, in October 1839 and immigrated to the United States in 1851. He was among the Union cavalry under the command of Col. E. R. S. Canby when they met Confederate troops advancing up the Rio Grande Valley in February 1862 in what became known as the Battle of Valverde, Giese said. The Confederates, commanded by Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley, tried to go around Fort Craig near Socorro. Sibley’s plan was to cross the Rio Grande at a ford called Valverde. “The Confederates made a dash on a Union battery that was covering the ford and took it in what was the decisive tactical maneuver of the battle,” Giese said.

McNally, seriously wounded in the hip, mustered a group of volunteers in a skirmish line and successfully freed Union troops trapped between the lines. The battle, nonetheless, was a Confederate victory. “As a result of the Confederate advance past Fort Craig, they went on to take Albuquerque and Santa Fe,” Giese said.

It was once thought that McNally’s actions at Valverde resulted in his Medal of Honor, but Cody determined that McNally, like Stanley, was recognized for bravery during the Indian Wars. McNally’s actual citation, which he received September 6, 1869, reads: “The President of the United States of America [Ulysses S. Grant], in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to First Sergeant James McNally, United States Army, for bravery in scouts and actions against Indians during 1868 and 1869, while serving with Company E, 8th U.S. Cavalry, in action at Arizona Territory.”⁵

The October 1999 ceremony honoring McNally took place at 10 a.m. at the cemetery in Kingston. The ceremony for Stanley was held at 1 p.m. at the graveyard in Hillsboro.

Other Medal of Honor recipients buried in the area are Alonzo Bowman and John Schnitzer, interred at Fort Bayard; and Leonida Lytle, buried at Memory Lane Cemetery in Silver City.

+ + +

corroborates his move from Sierra County before his death. *Sierra County Advocate* (November 25, 1904), https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sc_advocate_news/2023.

⁵ <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/1493>

Editor's Note

The bronze plaque on McNally's cenotaph reads: "Near this spot lie the unidentified remains of a true American hero. Born in Ireland in 1839, James McNally served in the 3rd and 8th US Cavalry from 1858–1883. He was wounded during the Civil War Battle of Valverde, NM 21 February 1862. After his final discharge, James lived in Hatch, Hillsboro and Kingston, NM where he worked several mining claims. He died in Kingston [sic] 24 November 1904. He had no identified survivors. First Sergeant James McNally was presented the nation's highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor, for his bravery in scouts and actions against Indians in 1868 and 1869."

In the case of Stanley, the plaque reads: "Near this spot lie the unidentified remains of a true American hero, Ebin (Eben) Stanley. Born in Decatur [sic] County, Iowa, Ebin served with the 3rd and 5th US Cavalry from 1861 to 1873. Variousy described as a rancher, miner, hotel operator, Indian scout, and outlaw (The Clanton Gang), he died in Cold Springs, New Mexico. He was survived by his wife Mary Elsie (Clanton) and two stepsons Burt and Loe Slinkard. Sgt. Stanley was presented the nation's highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor, for his gallantry in action at the Battle of Turret Mountain Arizona 25-27 March 1873."

Ironically, the confusion about exact details of these two men's lives continued even with the installation of the cenotaphs. Stanley's name, for instance, is spelled on the plaque as both "Ebin" and "Eben," and his birthplace is misspelled as "Decatur County." Some online photos of the monument identify Stanley as one of the Buffalo Soldiers, although that is almost certainly not the case, since he never served in either the 9th or 10th Cavalries, of which they were members. (There are no known extant photographs of either Stanley or McNally.) And McNally's monument clearly states that he died and is buried in Kingston, though as noted above his grave and military tombstone are in fact in Los Angeles. Perhaps historical ambiguity and confusion are yet another of the points of convergence in the parallel stories of these two valiant soldiers!

–Joe Britton