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## Newnan native Jackson escorts Obama at Arlington ceremony

By Winston Skinner  
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Col. Joe M. Jackson, the only living Coweta native to earn the Medal of Honor, is staying busy these days.

Jackson, who has celebrated his 86th birthday, received the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam. During the last week in March, he and other Medal of Honor recipients traveled to New York and to Washington, D.C.

In New York, Jackson was invited to ring the closing bell on the New York Stock Exchange. Letting a bit of his sharp sense of humor out, Jackson noted he rang the bell on a day when the market took a steep and welcome climb.

Then on March 25, Jackson accompanied Pres. Barack Obama for Medal of Honor Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery.

Obama was escorted by four veterans -- Navy Lt. John W. Finn, a 99-year-old veteran of World War II; Navy Capt. Thomas J. Hudner, an 84-year old Korean War veteran; Army Col. Robert L. Howard, a 69-year old Vietnam veteran; and Jackson.

Jackson, 86, served in both the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Jackson was chosen for the escort as the senior Vietnam era medal holder at the ceremonies. Hudner and Finn were the senior veterans from their eras of service, and Howard is the current president of the Medal of Honor Society.

Obama's visit to Arlington National Cemetery for the March 25 ceremonies was unannounced. Approximately 35 of the 98 living Medal of Honor recipients were present for the wreath-laying ceremony.

Though it was first awarded some 150 years ago, only 3,448 troops have received the honor conferred for conspicuous courage at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. Several hundred sightseers and tourists visiting the cemetery watched as the military heroes from World War II, Korea and Vietnam stood in two separate rows, facing the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Obama walked down the steps of the amphitheater toward the tomb, with Finn, Howard, Hudner and Jackson.

Obama and the medal recipients walked together toward a large flowered wreath, bearing the words, "Medal of Honor Day," that soldiers carried on a stand and placed between them and the Tomb. Obama then placed his hands on the wreath. As a drum

roll began, and "Taps" was played, the president and the four heroes placed their right hands on their hearts.

"Members of our Armed Forces hold themselves to the highest standards and set an example of responsibility to one another and to the country that should inspire all Americans to serve a purpose greater than themselves." Obama said. "Today we pay our respect to those who distinguished themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty -- the recipients of the Medal of Honor."

The assembled medal recipients formed a receiving line as the president stopped to shake hands and talk briefly with each one.

In a White House statement released later in the day, the president praised all who wear the uniform of the nation's armed forces and singled out Medal of Honor recipients, who he characterized as the "bravest of the brave."

Jackson has taken part in wreath laying ceremonies before, but never at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. "It's always a very emotional thing. You realize the people for whom you are laying the wreath have given all they could for this nation," he reflected.

Jackson was born in Newnan and grew up in Coweta County, the youngest of seven brothers. His last surviving brother, Philip Jackson, lived in Newnan until his death last year at 93. Another brother, Dan Jackson, was a Coweta County Commissioner for several years.

Jackson noted his brothers living into their nineties and his mother making it past the century mark. "I'm shooting for 100," he said.

"I'm healthy," he said, explaining his busy pace. He said he has events on his calendar monthly through July and is taking a break - to rest - in August.

He has some problems with his vision and copes with arthritis. "Everybody who gets to be 86 has arthritis of one kind or another," he said.

Joe Jackson and his wife, Rosamond, who is known to all as "Rose," live in Kent, Wash. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and the U. S. Air Force from 1942-1975.

He and Major Stephen Pless, who was also born in Newnan, received the Medal of Honor from Pres. Lyndon Johnson in the same White House ceremony on Jan. 16, 1969. Both Cowetans were recognized for using aircraft to rescue American troops in separate incidents in Vietnam.

Pless died less than a year after the White House ceremony. A statue of Pless and Jackson by sculptor Mark Byrd is to eventually be placed in Veteran's Memorial Plaza at the city park at Jackson Street and Temple Avenue.

The Jackson-Pless National Guard Armory is named in honor of the Medal of Honor heroes. Members of Georgia National Guard's 48th Infantry Brigade Bravo Company

Second Battalion -- currently stationed at the Jackson-Pless Armory -- are scheduled to leave for Afghanistan on April 13.

Since his Washington visit, Jackson has been to the Air Force Academy in Colorado. Photographs from "**Visions of Valor**," a book paying tribute to Medal of Honor recipients, have been enlarged and placed either on the walls or easels at the academy's library. Each 17 x 24 inch portrait is accompanied by a quote from that military hero.

**TriWest Healthcare Alliance** is funding the project - which also includes a completed exhibit at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and a planned exhibit at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.