Blackwell, Robert Lester [1]

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by Marcia Tuttle, 1979; Additional research provided by Kelly Agan; Revised December 2021

4 Oct. 1895–11 Oct. 1918

Robert Lester Blackwell. Image courtesy of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. [2]Robert Lester Blackwell, Congressional Medal of Honor winner, was born in Hurdle Mills in the Bushy Fork Community of Person County [3]. He was the second son and youngest of six children of James B. Blackwell, a tenant farmer and Civil War [4] veteran. Lester Blackwell attended Allen School of the Terrell system and, when he was drafted into the army on 19 Sept. 1917, was unmarried and a farmer in Person County. After basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., he was assigned to Company K, 119th Infantry, Thirtieth Division, which arrived in France on 24 May 1918. The following October, Blackwell's bravery on the battlefield near St. Souplet, France, earned for him the one of only two Congressional Medals of Honor [5] awarded to a North Carolinian during the First World War [6]. The citation reads: "When his platoon was almost surrounded by the enemy and his platoon commander asked for volunteers to carry a message calling for reinforcements, Private Blackwell volunteered for this mission, well knowing the extreme danger connected with it. In attempting to get through the heavy shell and machine gun fire this gallant soldier was killed." Another North Carolinian, Samuel I. Parker, a descendant of Supreme Court Justice James Iredell and Governor Abner Nash, also received the award. He received the award for his uncommon valor on July 18, 1918, near Soissons, France, when he ran directly into machine gun fire, killing the gunner with his pistol. Moreover, Blackwell also received the Cross of War from both the Italian and Portuguese governments. A monument was erected in his memory on the lawn of the Person County courthouse in Roxboro, and a North Carolina historical marker was placed along state Highway 49, near the site of his home.

References:

Durham Morning Herald, 24 Oct. 1965.

Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863–1973 (1973).

North Carolina State Archives (Raleigh), for the folder for Hist. Marker G-87.

Raleigh *News and Observer*, 10 Nov. 1963.

Raleigh Times, 24 Dec. 1966.

Additional Resources:

"Robert L. Blackwell." N.C. Highway Historical Marker G-87, N.C. Office of Archives & History. https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=G-87 [7] (accessed April 19, 2013).

Robert Lester Blackwell, (sculpture), Smithsonian Institute:http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID:siris_ari_325136 [8]

Image Credits:

Robert Lester Blackwell. Image courtesy of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Available from http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/2504/blackwell-robert-l.php [2] (accessed April 19, 2013).

Subjects:
Biographies [9]
Military personnel [10]
World War I (1914-1918) [11]
Authors:
Tuttle, Marcia [12]
Origin - location:
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