



The 2022 AOH-LAOH JFK Memorial Medal

In accordance with Article XXVI of the National Constitution of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, nominations were requested for the John F. Kennedy Memorial Medal for 2022. There were five nominations received from LAOH and AOH qualified nominators. The names submitted were certainly some of the worthiest candidates since the inception of this award. The purpose of the award is to recognize a Catholic of Irish birth or descent outstanding in his or her field of endeavor. On behalf of myself and vice-chair LAOH Vice President Marilyn Madigan we are proud to announce that the 2022 AOH-LAOH JFK Memorial Medal recipient is Rocky Bleier. Bleier is best known in his role as running back for 1966 National Championship Notre Dame football team and a four-time Super Bowl Champion with the Pittsburgh Steelers. While those accomplishments in themselves would merit consideration for this prestigious award, it is his work off the field in his role as soldier and longtime veteran advocate where his continued level of excellence has set him apart from so many others. LAOH Vice President Marilyn Madigan adds “President Kennedy challenged us in his Inaugural Address and in his Administration with the Peace Corps to give service to others as Americans. Rocky Bleier

accepted that challenge with his Military Service during the Vietnam War where he was a Profile in Courage. His work helping other Veterans and his community involvement demonstrate his commitment to the JFK's quote "Ask not what America can do for you ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world ask not what America will do for you but what we can do for the freedom of man"

Rocky Bleier will receive the prestigious award at the closing banquet of the 2022 AOH-LAOH National Convention in his beloved Pittsburgh on Saturday July 16th.

New Orleans AOH member John Fitzmorris prepared the following biography for Bleier's nomination:

Robert Patrick Bleier Jr. was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, the oldest of four children to Robert "Bob" and Ellen Bleier, a solid Catholic Irish-German family; and Rocky's maternal grandmother was a member of the McGuire family. He attended St. Joseph's Parochial School and Xavier High School in Appleton where he excelled at both football and basketball. With neither great speed nor agility, his simple desire to succeed translated into running harder and playing smarter to stand out on the field and led him to a scholarship to Notre Dame to play for legendary coach Ara Parseghian. He played on the 1966 National Championship Team for the Fighting Irish and in the famous 10-10 tie against Michigan State in 1966.

Bleier lasted until the 16th round when he was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers. Football often is compared to war by the overly-dramatic, but Rocky Bleier knows the difference because another draft awaited him. His induction notice to the U.S. Armed Forces joined him with the thousands of young men fighting in the fields and jungles of Vietnam. Reluctantly but with a sense of duty, Rocky put aside his professional career to serve his country—and with the same tenacity with which he played football. He was assigned as a squad grenadier in Company C,

4th Battalion (Light), 31st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade. On August 20, 1969, while on patrol in Hiep Duc, Bleier was wounded in the left thigh by an enemy rifle bullet when his platoon was ambushed in a rice paddy. While he was down, an enemy grenade landed nearby after bouncing off a fellow soldier, sending shrapnel into his lower right leg and tearing off a part of his right foot. He was later awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

Rocky began a painful rehabilitation that took two years, but he defied the odds, rejoined the Steelers, and became part of what is arguably the greatest football dynasty in the history of professional football, winning four Super Bowl rings, and finishing his career with 3,855 yards rushing.

A fixture in the Pittsburgh community, Rocky lends his name and presence to numerous charitable causes like helping his fellow Veterans. He has established The Veterans Benefit Institute, an organization that is dedicated to helping our country's veterans receive the benefits that they deserve.

Few individuals can say that they served their country in the military and then have played in the NFL. Even fewer have been wounded in combat only to return and play for a significant period in professional football. Only Rocky Bleier can say that he survived the hell and the heartbreak of combat wounds to fight back, help win four Super Bowls, and then turn his experiences into blessings that he can share with the greater community.

Robert Patrick "Rocky" Bleier has embodied in his life and his example the highest ideals of Friendship, Unity, and Christian Charity, and he embodies the spirit of the John F. Kennedy Memorial Medal.