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NEWS RELEASE

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**New Details Discovered About Irish-immigrant War Hero
Who Will Be Honored in Hot Springs Ceremony March 14**

HOT SPRINGS NATIONAL PARK, Arkansas – New details have been discovered about the life of Irish immigrant John King, one of only 19 people who have received two Congressional Medals of Honor and who will be honored March 14 with a ceremony at his Hot Springs gravesite.

Governor Mike Beebe and Irish Consul General Martin Rouine have been invited to attend the ceremony in Calvary Cemetery at 2 p.m. March 14. King was buried there after he died in May 1938 while being treated for pneumonia at the Army & Navy General Hospital.

The March 14 ceremony is being coordinated by the Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau with the assistance of the Thadeus H. Caraway Post 2278 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Post Commander Ralph Faresc.

The VFW is coordinating the military portion of the event and several other local groups have asked to be involved with the ceremony.

Calvary Cemetery, the local Catholic cemetery is located at the intersection of Greenwood Avenue and Third Street. The shortest route is to take Central Avenue to Greenwood and turn west.

Details about King's life and the circumstances surrounding his two Medals of Honor were extremely sketchy until Elizabeth Robbins, executive director of the Garland County Historical Society, began an intensive search for more information.

"Liz Robbins was able to discover an incredibly detailed account of John King's life," said Steve Arrison, CEO of the HSCVB. "She and the Historical Society found sources of details about John King's emigration to America, his service in the United States Navy and the circumstances of his heroism that won him not one, but two, Congressional Medals of Honor.

"She was able to find the details of how this American hero came to be in Hot Springs and the accident that led to his death.

"The Historical Society is an incredible treasure for Hot Springs and we are grateful for their help on projects such as this one."

Here is the new information that Robbins was able to assemble regarding John King:

"When John King was growing up in Ballinrobe, a small market town in County Mayo on the western coast of Ireland, he could not have imagined how far his life would take him – across oceans, to great honors in his adopted country, and to a final resting place in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

"A farmer's son, John was born on February 7, 1862, to Michael and Ellen Flannery King. John immigrated to the United States when he was 24, arriving in New York on April 14, 1886. He enlisted in the United States Navy on July 20, 1893, serving as a Coal Passer on the USS *Vermont*. His rating was changed to Fireman, second class, on September 30 of that year, and to Fireman, first class, on March 31, 1895. He served for the next 26 years, during which time his rating was changed to Oiler, then to Water Tender, and finally to Chief Water Tender (a chief petty officer in charge of a boiler room) from October 1, 1909.

"From 1893 to 1900 he served aboard the USS *Vermont*, USS *New York*, and the USS *Massachusetts*. His first wartime service (for which he was awarded a good

conduct badge, the Sampson Medal, and the Spanish Campaign Medal) was on the battleship *Massachusetts* while it was on blockade duty off the coast of Cuba during the Spanish American War.

“In 1900 he was sent to the gunboat USS *Vicksburg*, which sailed from Boston by way of the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal to the Philippines, where the U.S. was fighting Filipino rebels. On May 29, 1901, while lying off Port Isabella in the Philippines, the *Vicksburg* was shaken by what every sailor dreaded – a boiler explosion. King rushed to the dangerous scene and, in his words, “shut off the main stop of the boiler and smothered it up with blankets and towels.” He was awarded the Medal of Honor, with his citation for “heroism in the line of his profession” signed by President Theodore Roosevelt.

“In January 1903 King was transferred to the USS *Piscataqua*, and then to the USS *Rainbow*, USS *Solace*, and USS *Hancock*. From 1904-1908 he served on the USS *Des Moines*, USS *Franklin*, USS *Virginia*, USS *Franklin*, with the Reserve Torpedo Flotilla, and again with the *Franklin*. In 1908 he was sent again to the *Franklin* and then to the USS *Wabash*. He was able to visit his family in Ballinrobe before reporting to his next ship, the USS *Salem*.

“The *Salem* (a light scout cruiser and one of the U.S. Navy’s first turbine-engined warships) was on station in the Atlantic when King earned his second Medal of Honor. King later stated that there was an “explosion in a boiler [which] carried away the tube and 12 men in the fire-room stood in danger of being scalded to death. I was in the fire-room, and turned on the blowers full force. There was 310 pounds of steam on at the time. I was badly scalded on the arms, but went back to the fire-room and stayed until the engineer of the watch found me, and sent me to sick bay. We got all the men out of the fire-room and no one was injured.”

“Now 47 years old, King received a rare second Medal of Honor. This time President William Taft signed his citation for “Extraordinary heroism in the line of his profession.

“A month after becoming a naturalized United States citizen in November 1912, King was transferred to the USS *Florida* and served on it until his discharge from the Navy on September 24, 1916.

In 1917 King married Delia McKenna, a Ballinrobe native, and prepared to enjoy civilian life. However, two days after the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, King was recalled to active duty. He was assigned to a receiving ship and then a receiving station (which processed recruits) at New York City. On August 20, 1919, he was released from active duty.

“In 1921 John and Delia King moved back to Ireland, setting up house in Currabee, a village on the outskirts of Ballinrobe. Retired Chief Garda Superintendent Michael Burke, a relative of King, recalled that in Ballinrobe King was “as fine a looking man as you’d see walking down the street – particularly when he had his long overcoat on.” He also recalled King’s generous payments of five shillings for each errand he ran for him when he was a small boy.

“After Delia’s death and burial in Ballinrobe in 1936, King returned to the United States and moved into the Naval Home in Philadelphia. After he broke his right leg when he tripped over an iron bench in the Home’s grounds, he was sent to the Army and Navy General Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas, for treatment. He lived there from February 1937 until his death from pneumonia on May 20, 1938. He was 78 years old.

“King received a funeral mass at St. John’s Catholic Church in Hot Springs and was buried in Calvary Cemetery in Hot Springs. In the early 1990s a VA Medal of Honor headstone was placed on his grave by the Medal of Honor Historical Society. The U.S. Navy honored John King by naming the USS *John King* (DDG-3), a guided missile destroyer, after him. (The USS *John King* was commissioned on February 4, 1961, and decommissioned on March 30, 1990.)

“On September 4, 2010, a memorial to John King was unveiled by Irish Defense Minister Tony Kileen at the Cornmarket in Ballinrobe. The life-size bronze statue, sponsored by the John King Memorial Committee and the Ballinrobe Community Development Council, is the work of renowned Irish sculptor Rick Lewis. As was pointed out during the ceremony, more Medals of Honor have been awarded to Irishmen than to members of any other nationality out of the 33 nationalities that have fought with U.S. forces. Two hundred fifty-eight men from Ireland have won the award.

“Two medals have been awarded to only nineteen men, and six of those nineteen were Irish. Hot Springs is honored to be the final resting place of one of these remarkable Irish (and American) heroes, John King.”

For more information contact Steve Arrison at 501-321-2027.

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