

US honours Limerick's Korean War dead at last

By NORMA PRENDVILLE

HALF-a-century after they lost their lives fighting for a country not their own, five Limerickmen were among 27 Irishmen named and honoured as US citizens in a ceremony in Washington last week. The ceremony, attended by Sen Ted Kennedy as well as family members of the dead Irishmen, was the final act in a 25-year campaign spearheaded by John Leahy from Lixnaw, Kerry.

"These soldiers were wronged nearly 50 years ago," Mr Leahy said. "It is time for this injustice to be addressed."

The 27 men died in the Korean War between 1950 and 1952, and, therefore, did not benefit from a US Bill which subsequently granted citizenship to those taking part in the war after 1952. Mr Leahy's campaign was to reverse this injustice.

The five Limerickmen were: William (Billy) Collins, Tullig South, Templeglantine; John Francis Dillon, Coole, Kiltteely; Patrick McEnery, Turaree Lower, Glin, Alphonsus O'Connell, Sarsfield Avenue, Garryowen and William (Billy) Scully of Kilgrena, Galbally. Two of them, Alphonsus O'Connell and Billy Scully were awarded the Purple Heart for bravery.

Combat Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, US Army. In September 1950, the 8th took part in Gen Douglas MacArthur's famous amphibious landing at Inchon. They came ashore far behind the lines of North Korean forces. The hazardous task of clearing mines was one of the main duties of the 1st Cavalry Division engineers. On October 29, 1951, Alphonsus O'Connell was killed in action in North Korea. He had been sent to clear mines left behind by retreating Chinese forces when an explosion claimed his life.

Only weeks later, his battalion was withdrawn from Korea after over 500 days in combat. His remains were not repatriated, but were buried in a military cemetery in the US. His mother Elizabeth, received a letter of sympathy from President Harry Truman telling her that the Purple Heart had been awarded posthumously to her son.

Billy Scully, was one of 14 children born to Denis and Bridget Scully, and the family originally lived in Kilgrena, Galbally, but later moved to nearby Deerpark. Billy, who played gaelic football and was adept at hurling, emigrated in 1947 when he was 23 with his older brother Jack. Their three sisters, Mollie, Nellie and Kitty were already settled in the US.

Jack, had misgivings about going to the US as he was concerned that his younger brother could be drafted into the US army in the event of war. Billy, however, wanted to stay and a year after he arrived he was called up to serve



• John Francis Dillon, Coole, Kiltteely. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 24, 1930, to Irish parents, and raised in Kiltteely from the age of four to 17 years. PVT E-2, US Army, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. Killed in Action, North Korea, February 9, 1953. Buried in Kiltteely Cemetery, and, right, a picture taken while his was on his tour of duty in North Korea



• Alphonsus O'Connell, Sarsfield Avenue, Garryowen. Born June 29, 1927. US home was New York City. CPL, US Army, 8th Engineer Combat Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division. Killed in Action, North Korea, October 29, 1951. Buried in Long Island National Cemetery, Farmingdale, New York



• Patrick McEnery, Turaree Lower, Glin. Born October 12, 1927. US home was Chicago, Illinois. PFC US Army, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. Killed in Action, North Korea, November 13, 1951. Body Not Recovered



• William (Billy) Collins, Tullig South, Templeglantine. Born December 14, 1928. US home was Queens, New York. PFC US Army, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. Killed in Action, South Korea, May 18, 1951. Buried in Long Island National Cemetery, Farmingdale, New York



William (Billy) Scully of Kilgrena, Galbally. Born February 9, 1924. US home was Manhasset, Nassau County, New York. PFC, US Army, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. Killed in Action, South Korea, January 14, 1951. Buried in Galbally Cemetery

a tour of duty as an infantry trainee.

His nephew Denis Henebry said that Billy was given a choice when called up - enlist or return to Ireland. He was honourably discharged into the Enlisted Reserve, but was recalled to active service in October 1950.

That December he was sent to Korea where he served with the 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. On January 14, 1951, and only weeks after his arrival, Billy was killed in action by a sniper's bullet barely a month short of his 27th birthday.

His body was brought back to Ireland and he was buried in Galbally. Billy was awarded the Pur-

ple Heart posthumously.

William (Billy) Collins was the son of Lawrence and Mary Collins from Tullig South, Templeglantine. In 1947, following his mother's death, he emigrated to Queens, Long Island, and worked in the Manhattan branch of A&P, a well-known supermarket chain.

His ambition was to become an American citizen and he declared his papers but in November 1950 he was called up and arrived in Korea in February 1951. There was assigned to a heavy mortar company in the 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On May 18, 1951, he was killed in action in South Korea, aged 22; he was buried in New York.

John Francis Dillon was born in

Hartford, Connecticut, on July 24, 1930. He was the first child of Patrick and Mary Dillon who had emigrated to America in 1929, but the family returned to Coole, Kiltteely when John was four. As a child, John was always immensely proud of his American status so it came as no great surprise when at the age of 17 he announced that he wanted to return home to the US.

In March 1948, John Dillon set off and his 10 brothers and sisters were never to see him again. Before sailing from Southampton, he sent his last £1 note back home to his mother.

Back in the US, John Francis Dillon, volunteered for the army at the age of 19. He was sent to Korea where he served with the

32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. On February 9, 1953 during a hard fought battle, in which he reportedly fought with great courage, John was killed in action aged 22 and he was buried at Coole cemetery on May 30, 1953.

At the graveside, an officer of the US army handed the Stars and Stripes, the flag for which John Dillon gave his young life, to his grieving mother. Five months after his death hostilities ceased in Korea.

Thomas Joseph O'Brien from Ballyvistica, Emly, and Maurice Angland from Meentinna, Rockchapel, were also among those granted retrospective citizenship at last week's Washington ceremony.