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Medal of Honor Recipient on “Remember The Ramrods”

Transcript of Veterans Radio Host Jim Fausone’s Interview with [David Bellavia](#)
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MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT DAVID BELLAVIA

"REMEMBER THE RAMRODS"



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Interview with David Bellavia

[Staff Sergeant David Bellavia](#) is the only living Medal of Honor Recipient from the Iraq War. Bellavia tells the story behind one of the Iraq War's legendary acts of valor; the men he fought with and the healing of reunion.

In 2004, David Bellavia's U.S. Army unit, an infantry battalion known as "*The Ramrods*" – 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division – fought and helped win the Battle of Fallujah, the bloodiest episode of the Iraq War. On November 10, 2004, Bellavia single-handedly cleared a fortified enemy position that had pinned down a squad from his platoon. Fourteen years later, Bellavia got a call from the President of the United States: he had been awarded a [Medal of Honor](#) for his actions in Fallujah and would receive America's highest award for bravery in combat during a ceremony at the White House.

In the following transcript of his [Veterans Radio interview](#) with host Jim Fausone, the reluctant recipient talks about reuniting with his squadmates, behind the scenes of the Medal of Honor ceremony, and his interactions with President Donald J. Trump.

Jim Fausone: We want to welcome to Veterans Radio today, Medal of Honor recipient David Bellavia. David, welcome to Veterans Radio.

David Bellavia: Thank you. I appreciate it.



David Bellavia

Fausone: Well this is an extraordinary and unique story. In 2004, David was with a U.S. Army unit "*The Ramrods*" and they were on the pointy end of the spear, it was the Second Battle of Fallujah. David's squad after three days of constant fighting was checking a darkened house at night. I think it was the tenth house that the squad had gone in to clear and all hell broke loose. Some of that was actually captured on film because there was an embedded reporter.

Ultimately David, as the Staff Sergeant, decided something's got to be done to protect the guys here and he went in and single-handedly cleared the house. I think there were four insurgents who were killed and another that was severely wounded. All

of that action was done to stop the fire that was raining down on his squad. As NCO, it was his call. He couldn't send anybody else in, this was something he had to do. That's to some extent what they expected of Sergeant "Bell", as he was affectionately known. David, you've had a chance to recount this story a number of times. Before we get there, give us a little about why you joined the Army, to begin with.

Bellavia: My grandfather, who I'm blessed to still have in my life, is 102.

Fausone: Wow!

Bellavia: He's a Normandy Vet. Has been to Sicily, North Africa, and the Normandy campaign. He got D-Day, plus 30, so he came in with the Patton boys. As a young kid, I would listen to the stories of my grandfather. He never glorified combat, it wasn't a situation where he was telling me that this is something that's cool or combat is great, but it was a sense of this generational nobility that each American is asked to do and if you can get through it, if you can experience it, your life has a completely different meaning. Family, peace, and tranquility is never going to mean as much unless you go through the crucible of war.

In the back of my head growing up, I just thought to myself that eventually, I'm going to do this. I'm going to get drafted or the Army's going to reach out and touch me. The cycle of life took over, but I finally got to a point where I was home from college and we had a home invasion and these two drug addicts came into the house and terrorized my family, they were armed and they were stealing and robbing and I had a shot to defend my family. I didn't do it. So I realized thinking back, well the Army's not going to reach out to get me. I've got to grow up and I've got to learn some lessons. There was no war going on in the late 90s. Peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo were big missions. So I signed up and became an infantryman and that's what I felt my family business was. It was our Legacy.

Fausone: Well to some extent, you wanted to see if you measured up.

Bellavia: You're absolutely right. I didn't understand that... you go through the Army in your youth and you don't really know what the world is like. And then you leave and realize that ultimately, in my life, that is the ultimate challenge of an adult. Am I leaving my uniform in a better place than I got it? Am I making my community better? Am I making my organization better? Am I needed? Well, we look at all the problems veterans go through when we get out – addiction, suicide, depression. It's all about whether or not they're needed. Do we have a purpose? Do we have validation? Is there someone out there that wants me as an integral part of a community and a team? It's so hard to replace that feeling as a civilian. Being needed in a fight, being needed in a group, is such an incredible experience that you chase that dragon

for the rest of your life.

Fausone: In fact, in David's most recent book, "Remember the Ramrods: An Army Brotherhood in War and Peace," one of the lines I wrote down when reading it was "proving to yourself why you are needed in the fight." I thought that really struck a chord. You mentioned your grandfather, but your family, your dad was not in the military, was he?

Bellavia: No. My dad was a dentist. There was a time before 9/11, I'm the youngest of four, grew up in Buffalo and everyone in my family – has higher education, professional degrees, Masters, PhDs – this was the lane you went to show that you were going to carry on the family tradition. No one went into Dentistry, but my dad was eagerly hoping his last youngest son would do that. So my dad was fixated on taking people out of discomfort, having discourse – and so he saw this move to the military as almost like a rebellion. Why do you want to break things? Why do you want to fight?

I get all my wisdom from the Vietnam generation. They've been through everything we've been through, they had families, and they had jobs. We don't need to look at a magic eight ball when we look at our future, we look at the Vietnam generation and think to look at the way these men and women have conducted themselves. This is our future. They're wonderful examples of that. When I talk to those Vietnam Vets, many of them didn't even get appreciated until 9/11. That wasn't just a generational fight, 9/11 was a generational thank you for your service, whether it was law enforcement, First Responders, or Vietnam Veterans and current members. After 9/11 happened, all of our families became like soccer moms. They were so proud that we chose this. That the war happening, but we made the decision to want to do this. So that relationship with my dad and my service completely changed, as it did for many sons and dads after September 11th.

Fausone: You were sort of an interesting enlisted in the Army kind of guy. You were a non-drinker, you were studied, you were a writer, and you had a young son that had medical who you missed dearly. You were a different kind of Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) as I read this and as I understand it. Can you explain to our listeners who maybe don't understand what the role of an NCO is to them?

Bellavia: Yeah. So the NCO is the backbone of the military. We go to foreign countries and we try to rebuild armies. One of the things that Iraq and Afghanistan were sorely missing was an NCO Corps, which is that connection between the officer and the enlisted soldier on the ground. The NCO becomes almost a surrogate father. We conduct the training, we make sure that everyone is ready in their personal lives, in their professional lives, they're ready for the fight, they're ready for Garrison,

they're ready for life. You've got the principal of a school who's your senior NCO and your command sergeant majors, your Colonels, the Teacher in the classroom, is what the NCO is. We're with you all day, we want to make sure you're prepared and you're ready. And you take over that surrogate father role where you're tucking them to bed, you're making sure they're eating, you're making sure that they're healthy and they're making good decisions.

For the longest part, I would look at a subordinate that was young and earnest and physically fit and super smart, and for a long time, I saw that as a threat. I think most civilians will see someone coming up as thinking this guy's going to take your job, he's better than you. It didn't really dawn on me until combat that that's actually my purpose for living. As an NCO, I can only be judged by what my subordinates do better than me, and I have to be replaced. It's a necessity in our military that the current generation is more proficient and disciplined and professional than the previous generation. So your job isn't to professionally goaltend the young kid coming up, your job is to nurture it and break out that greatness inside of them. Once you realize that a leader is only judged by how their subordinates eclipse them, you start to understand the game and understand why we're here. And then you are a father and it's because I had a little boy at home, that gestation was pretty natural.

Fausone: You talk about in *"Remember the Ramrods"* the role that you ultimately recognized, which was you were to bring out the best soldier in everybody. And everybody's different, and you're to bring out the best warrior in everybody and there's a different way to do that with folks whether they follow the book or they are total screw-ups, there's still a great soldier inside. That part I also found very interesting as you wrote. You were in the Army for six years, I believe. Your first book was *"House to House."* Can you just talk a little bit about that and then we'll roll into the current book, *"Remember the Ramrods"*?

Bellavia: There was a generation of [Global War on Terror](#) veterans that came home in the first wave and we were writing books basically because we felt that a lot of civilians didn't know what we were actually fighting. You had two wars simultaneously going on, Afghanistan and Iraq, and politics subsumed all of that. You've got good wars and bad wars. Iraq was the war of choice, the war that was based on bad intelligence. Afghanistan was avenging 9/11 and getting to the important parts of why we were at war as a generation. To me, I read so much – from *All Quiet on the Western Front* to all the classics that came from World War II and Vietnam and Caputo's *Rumor of War* to Hackworth and officers and enlisted – and there really was no genre of book that talked about that small unit relationship.

I wanted a deep dive as to what actual combat is like, trying to make it realistic,

but also trying to show that we've got to be super cautious when we go to war. There's a cost to it. I don't think at the time I wrote "House to House" in 2006-07, that I understood that cost. I understood the maturity and the distance it takes to look back. We change and when we try to fight that change, combat transforms us permanently. You can resist it, you can deny it, you can put it off and kick it down the road. Ultimately it rears its ugly head in almost every aspect of life. It will rear its ugly head everywhere. So, you can be a victim of the trauma or you can be empowered by the trauma. So how do we conduct ourselves? Are we living for people that we lost? Are we sacrificing and being a better individual because of people that we didn't bring home? Or are we going to be entombed by that and be a victim of that? I think it takes sometimes 20 years for you to kind of look back and do an inventory and say, well here are the mistakes I made, here are the things that are working out.

Fausone: I want to point out that it was in November of 2004 when the Second Battle of Fallujah is raging and you have to ultimately clear this house. That activity initially got you the award of the [Silver Star](#), which was subsequently upgraded to the [Medal of Honor](#) in 2019. You wrote "House to House" in 2007. It's just three years after and the time for reflection, the time to maybe see all of the impacts of that trauma from war maybe hadn't all come to the surface yet, David.

Bellavia: You're absolutely right. The other thing too is that it was such a weird experience. I never knew that I was nominated for the Medal of Honor. It was the media that was telling everyone in 2004-2006 that I was nominated for the Medal of Honor. I thought it was going to happen, it was just a matter of time, but these are big investigations.

Then I hear about this reporter who filmed the event and there's a tape out there and now I'm thinking, well what's on the tape? Maybe what was on the tape was so horrible that it didn't work out with my version. But the Medal of Honor is an award that they don't interview you for. They don't care what you think you saw or did. The only thing that can go into a Medal of Honor award process is what other people witnessed. So, if you engage two individuals but no one saw it happen, it didn't happen. It's not in the citation. The only thing that's in the citation is the evidence of something that happened from two people's perspectives – not one, but two. So, you need two witnesses. My biggest problem was that what had been witnessed was only on a tape with a foreign journalist and I figured this was never going to happen. It's not the end of the world. My award was coming home and being with my family.

Fausone: Amen. The mere fact that this Australian journalist was embedded, and he's only got a few minutes of tape on this but helps demonstrate the chaos under which everybody is operating. I think it's really helpful for the general public to understand the Medal of Honor isn't something you raise your hand and say, I'd like

to get that and I did really cool stuff.

Bellavia: So the tape is 29 minutes long. The documentary he made, ["Only the Dead"](#), that went on HBO, that's really the five or six minutes that he put in that documentary. It was apparent to me, and the Army doesn't tell you anything about the process. It's very opaque, it's very cloak and dagger. You don't know who voted, who did what, who said what – you're kept out of everything. But, it's very apparent to me that people saw the full tape and the questions that came from the Army and the investigations that are done that someone had access to that because they have information that no one really would have. And it's certainly not from my book and it's not from me. It's from what was on the tape.

In a way, it's a weird experience to know that the world is watching the videotape of you and you didn't know it existed. And then at the same time, you realize that without that videotape my unit, my friends, myself – none of us get the recognition without that videotape. So, it's that double-edged sword. We love Michael Ware because of what he did and what he provided for our unit.

Fausone: One of the things that other people don't understand is that you don't volunteer to be a Medal of Honor recipient. Unfortunately, most of them end up deceased as a result of their actions. Usually, there is somebody promoting this on your behalf. Was it the Army? Was it somebody at the unit level? Was it a journalist? I kind of refer to them as the *Medal of Honor sherpas* – somebody who helps carry this package through this elaborate process. You might come out the other end of that process, but somebody does a whole lot of work don't they?

Bellavia: They do. Honestly, the question I get asked the most is if you could do it all over again would you do it? My answer is no – 100% no. I don't mean that because I don't love my guys, I don't love my Army. This is way too much pressure to put on one person. To be the only living recipient of a war that had four million American men and women fighting is not at all reasonable. It's unsustainable. There are way too many boxes that you could put in. It's just not something I ever wanted for myself.

Honestly, I wouldn't want it for someone else either. It's not a fun process and it's not something you wake up every day and think, wow this is so great. I'm going to coast through life. It's actually a burden that is more difficult than serving. I'd rather have an apartment in Fallujah than wear this thing every single day because the expectations are unrealistic of what you expect to see from a recipient. You're absolutely right. These awards are the currency of combat, right?

You can do things as a unit and as a leader, but unless you have a Bronze Star, a

Silver Star, a Distinguished Service Cross, a Medal of Honor, Presidential Unit Citation – these are what encapsulate the moment when you were tested. It's not just an individual that you're trying to put out there, you're trying to put out there that all of your guys did special things. If you're going to give this guy the Medal of Honor, that Bronze Star you gave that kid – maybe that's the Distinguished Service Cross, maybe that's a Silver Star. Look at what these young people did. Mine was Doug Walter, who was my Company Commander. My other Commander who was killed in Fallujah was Sean Sims. Knowing that Sean Sims, before he died, acknowledged that this was something that was worthy of attention knowing that journalists and other people were telling this story.

Sometimes that story gets out of control and it's not really what happened, but it's a good story. Sometimes the Army wants to promote things that aren't exactly based on 100% reality. Doug Walter, Peter Smith, Peter Newell, and my division, they all were like hey, I know it's been 10-15 years, but put this thing up against anything you're currently looking at. I don't think until that videotape or documentary comes out, I don't think people believed it, honestly. I mean people tell stories and sometimes the fish is two inches long and sometimes at the end of ten years that fish is a whale.

Fausone: We call that false valor, absolutely.

Bellavia: So maybe people didn't believe it. It was too unbelievable. I get it. At the same time, I would rather people not believe the story than be the only guy on an island because it's a lot. Every time Iraq is in the news or every time something happens in the War on Terror – what side are you on? Everyone is going to want a piece. The Army wants a piece, politicians want a piece, and everyone wants something out of the recipient because if the recipient says the policy has failed, it gives it more credibility somehow and it doesn't make sense. It's not real. The Vietnam guys had 80 peers from different sides of the fight over 10 years. The Afghanistan guys are 22 of them from all over 2002 and the SEALs and Army and Marines. There needs to be more recipients from Iraq so that we can tell the entire story of what our generation did at War.

Fausone: Tell us why you wrote, *"Remember the Ramrods."*

Bellavia: I was at a point where I think for all of us, veterans in particular, we get to the point where we start hearing the guys that drop off the map. There are guys that take their own lives, there are guys that just want to put the war behind them. We kind of forget that we're NCOs and we're soldiers forever. I was at a point in my life where no one brought up the Army ever. I'd established myself in a career, nobody cared that I was a veteran. I wasn't low crawling to the copier, I wasn't

getting a short haircut, and I wasn't bringing attention to service. It was just this is who I am and this is what I do. When all of this attention came my way I thought that I went through with these guys. What is it that we're all missing?

For years I thought that I missed the war. I thought the war was what I needed in my life to feel complete and whole. It dawned on me going through this process that the war isn't what I missed at all, I missed the people. I miss the men, I miss the relationships, I miss the sense of purpose and obligation and duty. I can have that again without going to war, I could have those relationships again. What am I afraid of? Why not make this award about all of us? Why not get back to what we were? And if they're open to it and they were. The vast majority of these guys were like, I miss you and I can say things to you at 40 I couldn't say at 20. We don't say we love each other when we're 20 – we're too tough. But at 40, you can say you love another man. I miss you and I love you, give me a hug. That's where we're at in middle age we're able to tell each other how we feel, we miss each other, and we want each other to be back and it was such a healing, cathartic experience.

I thought to myself, all these books that people write as veterans, this is a good news story. We don't have to be alone. We don't have to go through these things alone. You're still an NCO. Go out there and be with your soldiers, lead your soldiers again, bring them together, call them up, and have them in your life. If they're struggling, help them back up just like you did 20 years ago.

Fausone: That is really the message, David, that I got out of the book and why the book is subtitled, *"An Army Brotherhood in War and Peace."* That's the message I think is powerful in Remember the Ramrods – if you were in service and you had those connections or you were the NCO, or you were the commander, get off the couch and reconnect with these guys, it's going to be powerful. Your reunion was around the Medal of Honor ceremony which is obviously extremely unique. Talk about how those 40 men came back together and maybe began healing, but certainly added to the healing that had been going on.

Bellavia: First of all, when you reach out, we're all different. We are from different socioeconomic backgrounds, we cancel each other's votes, and we root for the different teams on Sunday. We are a cross-section of America. Yet, we seem to get along, we seem to be able to work together, we disagree, and we're passionate, but we love each other and we respect each other.

I thought my entire destiny on this planet was to lead men at war, to lead men across an objective. When time goes by you realize your destiny is to be in someone's life, to impact their life, and they have such a hugely profound impact on my growth, on my matriculation to civilian life, on what kind of a father I am, what kind of a man I

am. I would not be the person I am if it wasn't for the Army and it wasn't for the soldiers I served with. It's tough to be getting a phone call 15 years later and saying, "Do you want to come to Washington and celebrate an individual?" All the stuff that you want to put in a box, you threw it in your barn, you close the door, you put it in a time capsule.

Do you want to unleash all of that and celebrate one guy? If that's the way it was sold to them, I'm not sure I would want to do it. We had to make this about us. This is not an individual award, it's a unit award. I'm not just going to stand up there and you're going to clap. You're going to come on the stage with me, you're going to meet the President with me, you're going to be a part of everything I do, I'm going to have 40 guys and girls that I served with, and the parents and children of the fallen, and we're all going to do this as one big group. That was a promise I made when I brought them out there and that's what we ended up doing. It was such an amazing, healing experience. They trusted me. We're back in each other's lives now and it's beautiful.

Fausone: Your book portrays a lot about the back side of the Medal of Honor ceremony which we and the general public get to see. Maybe a little news clip, maybe we'll watch it longer on YouTube, but you really peel it back and say how you were feeling, what you were seeing, what you were doing. I want to comment on a couple of these nuggets that you revealed and maybe you want to comment on a couple of more. President Trump, who awarded this in June of 2019 before he signed the citation, asked you, "Do you want me to do this?" What was your response?

Bellavia: I don't know! I didn't want anything to do with this. I said no so many times that they had to break out my enlistment contract. I mean the enlistment contract is specific about the Inactive Ready Reserve – the types of things the Army can do to call you back. And in small print, it's the recipient of the Medal of Honor. You can't say no. And so I didn't want it, I knew everything was going to change and I was comfortable – I loved my life and it was void of that time.

Fausone: David's got these three kids, he's successful in the radio business, he's what they call talent – I'm not, he is. You didn't need this and I thought it was funny that you reported, "Hey, I told him no, but he did it anyway." There was another surprise that the White House of the Army did because the guests at the Medal of Honor ceremony are all special folks. One of them for you goes all the way back to when you signed up. Tell us a little bit about that.

Bellavia: So the whole time the Army's prepping this big surprise and I'm thinking, it's got to be a Dodge Ram. It's got to be a brand-new car. There's got to be something like you're giving every Medal of Honor a box of money or like a jewel that

was found in Saddam's Palace. They're building this up, and at some point, you're like oh I don't care, I don't need anything. I just want to get back to normal. But they're building it up so much that it creeps into your thoughts at 2 AM. You become like an eight-year-old thinking, is this going to be a lifetime pass to Disney World? Am I going to get to try out for the Buffalo Bills as a backup quarterback? What is this surprise? And so they build it up, they have to announce it at the White House, and finally right before you're about to be introduced to the World on live television, they bring out my recruiter. I loved the guy, he's a wonderful human being, but talk about anti-climactic. I mean, for the Love of God.

Fausone: It really pointed out the arc of your career, right? I mean here's the beginning and the arc goes all the way through the 40 guests or more that you have there. Your troops, your men and brings you all the way to this ceremony. So it was an interesting arc that somebody said we ought to track that down if we can.

Bellavia: It was incredible. They put a tremendous amount of research in, they found the guy, he's a wonderful man. I'm just saying, I'm a grown man. Just tell me, "I found your recruiter." Don't build this up where the President of the United States is like, "We've got a big surprise for you." "What's that big surprise, Sir?" "It's your recruiter." Maybe a little bit of a Debbie Downer at that point. But he was a wonderful guy and it showed this guy put me in the Army, gave me this opportunity, and gave me an incredible trajectory. I learned so much. I love Sergeant Reina and I love the Army. I appreciate him.

Fausone: One of the other things we in the public see, there's a row of generals always and secretaries of defense or Army or whoever. In your instance, as I said, you had a lot of the Ramrods – I think it was 40 guys and family members – your family members. You have this big audience of 300 looking at you. Your boys kind of took it to a new level, didn't they? They were enthusiastic. Why don't you tell everybody about that?

Bellavia: There's a famous story of Andrew Jackson opening up the White House on inauguration day and a bunch of hillbillies just poured into the White House and started drinking alcohol and stomping on furniture with their boots. These Ramrods – I love these men. These guys are tough, you don't want to mess with the First Infantry Division in a fight, they're the salt of the earth, the fabric of America from all cities, rural, suburban, all walks of life, all demographics, sexualities, we got them all. They're beautiful, beautiful men. That ceremony is very sterile. It's all formal...

Fausone: I think the word the White House would say is, solemn not sterile.

Bellavia: It's a solemn ceremony and they turned it into a rally. It was like a promotion ceremony outside the barracks. You know there's a cross-section of our military. These guys are physically fit, they like their drink, they're rough guys, they're kind guys, they're wonderful people. In the White House, they were back at the barracks and they were loud and they were getting into it and it turned everything sideways. I thought General Milley and the Chiefs of Staff were going to lose their mind but they embraced it. I was so grateful for that because when Milley gets upset – those eyebrows – he gets angry and he'll turn on you. He gave us permission to be what we are and it was a cool experience.

Fausone: And you report in the book, you write and Remember the Ramrods, that unusual energy played right into President Trump who seems to get himself energized when the crowds energize. And this turned from a solemn occasion to really a celebration, which it should be anyway.

Bellavia: Trump was like at a rally. Once he started feeding off the crowd and the crowd was laughing, he was walking to the crowd. He's high-fiving people. He literally took it to a whole new level, but my guys responded to it. You forget that it's on TV and you forget that everyone's watching, but as the citation is being read, I'm looking at these guys' faces. I kind of forced these guys to go back in time, and not a lot of these guys necessarily wanted to. They wanted to be with each other, we wanted to be a unit again, and we wanted that camaraderie, but we weren't all prepared to go back to war. I started to see that on a stage in front of millions of people, I started to see that these guys are all going back with me. The willingness to do that for me was one of the most selfless acts right back to the war. These guys risked their lives for me and now they're willing to put themselves back at a horrible time just to be there with me. It meant the world to me. It touched my heart and it made me appreciate the Ramrods more than ever.



President Donald J. Trump presents the Medal of Honor to former U.S. Army Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia during a ceremony at the White House in Washington, D.C., June 25, 2019. Bellavia was awarded the Medal of Honor for actions while serving as a squad leader with the 1st Infantry Division in support of Operation Phantom Fury in Fallujah, Iraq when a squad from his platoon became trapped by intense enemy fire. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. Kevin Roy)

Fausone: As I said, this ceremony is very solemn normally. The Generals are there, the Secretaries are there. In your instance, there were seven living Medal of Honor attendees which is really unusual. High praise, this is an elite group of men who've done extraordinary things of Valor. I have talked to Medal of Honor recipients in the past who reveal that they were a little drunk during the ceremony – I was so nervous I had to have maybe more than I should have. You have a similar story to calm your nerves, you took a little dip. Tell us about telling us about that.

Bellavia: I'm not a drinker and I've never been one of those guys, but when you are going back into a wormhole. I was a big cigarette and tobacco user when I was in the war and obviously, I quit and I didn't need that anymore. But when I put the uniform back on, I felt like the uniform wasn't complete the without the tobacco. I needed to get back into that. That was who I was back, then I needed to get back into character. One of my friends, gave me some Copenhagen and I just threw a chaw in and I said wow, "I missed this, this is incredible."

Before I know it, the President's like, "Let's go." I said, "Sir, I've got a giant wad of tobacco in my mouth" and he said, "You're not going to go out there with tobacco in your mouth." I said, "What are my options here, Mr. President? I don't know what to do." He told me not to spit on his carpet. I said, "I'm not going to spit on your carpet, I promise you." All the photos of that ceremony – all these people came up to me and still do and say, "I looked at your face and you look so emotional, you look so stressed. You look like you were in a tough spot." I say honestly, I was just thinking don't swallow this juice because you're going to vomit on national TV. I had so much juice in my mouth that I didn't know what to do with, it so I just kind of like slowly started to swallow a little bit at a time to get through it. It was horrible. I never should have done it and don't do tobacco products.

Fausone: Well, there's a lot of vets who would get a big laugh out of that because they can relate to having chew at the wrong period of time and not have an outlet.



U.S. Army Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia poses for his official portrait in the Army portrait studio at the Pentagon in Arlington, VA., June 26, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Monica King)

I want to be serious as we finish here with David Bellavia, U.S. Army veteran, and recipient of the Medal of Honor, for his actions in the Second Battle of Fallujah in November of 2004. Having received the Medal of Honor award now in 2019, you've worn it for three years or so now. Can you talk to us a little bit about the responsibility you feel as a Medal of Honor recipient and maybe the weight that goes

with being such a recipient?

Bellavia: It's heavy. Most of these guys are young when they get the award and so the whole world is their oyster and everyone's going to go out and make different choices. I wanted to be the guy that went back to the Army. Even though I was 40 and old, I went and said use me. I don't know what to do with this thing, I don't want to go to Hollywood and be an action star, I want to take this and put more people in the Army. They said no one had ever offered that and they would like me. I said alright, great.

I went from the Medal of Honor stage in Washington D.C. to basically two and a half years all through COVID just recruiting as many people as I possibly could. Going from towns that have never seen a recipient of the award, to talking to parents, talking to kids about reenlisting, and going to ROTC graduations. Literally 27 days a month on the road – not signing autographs and making speeches – but just talking to young people about this choice. This choice to serve and how important it is and how we're needed more than ever with all the threats that are in the world. That was an incredible experience and that meant so much to me to be back – I was a soldier again. So much time had gone by, but yet it was like it was yesterday. I did that, I loved it and then I got out of that. I kind of went back to now this is real, this is happening now, what do you do with it?

The key is that you try to remind people that our country is worth any sacrifice and this award doesn't represent me or my actions, it represents generations of blood, generations of sacrifice. To get the Medal of Honor it has to be witnessed. How many people in a trench line in World War I did something that nobody saw? How many people in Korea did something that nobody saw? That sacrifice is there, it's with us. We have to acknowledge it and genuflect to those Generations, but at the same time be reminded that this next group is going to be as lethal, as professional, and as disciplined as any previous generation. These young kids – we could pile on the young generation and how irresponsible and they don't make their beds – but they are lethal and they are professional and they are decent, good men and women and they are ready to do whatever this country asks them to do. That is the new mission, and I'm proudly taking that mission on.

Fausone: We're talking to [David Bellavia](#), a Medal of Honor recipient, whose still a very young man who's going to carry this weight throughout his life and continue to hopefully demonstrate to people the value of service, the value of service above self and encourage those next generations. It's a great honor talking to you, David. Your current book, *"Remember the Ramrods: An Army Brotherhood in War and Peace"* is much more reflective than *"House to House,"* his earlier book. I think for those who want to get a better insight, they're both great reads. David, thanks for taking some time

today with [Veterans Radio](#).

Bellavia: Thank you for doing this program for as long as you have and doing it in the way you do it. You're giving a voice to so many people. God bless you and much respect. Thank you for doing what you do thank you.

About the Author

*Jim Fausone is a partner with **Legal Help For Veterans, PLLC**, with over twenty years of experience helping veterans apply for service-connected disability benefits and starting their claims, appealing VA decisions, and filing claims for an increased disability rating so veterans can receive a higher level of benefits.*

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