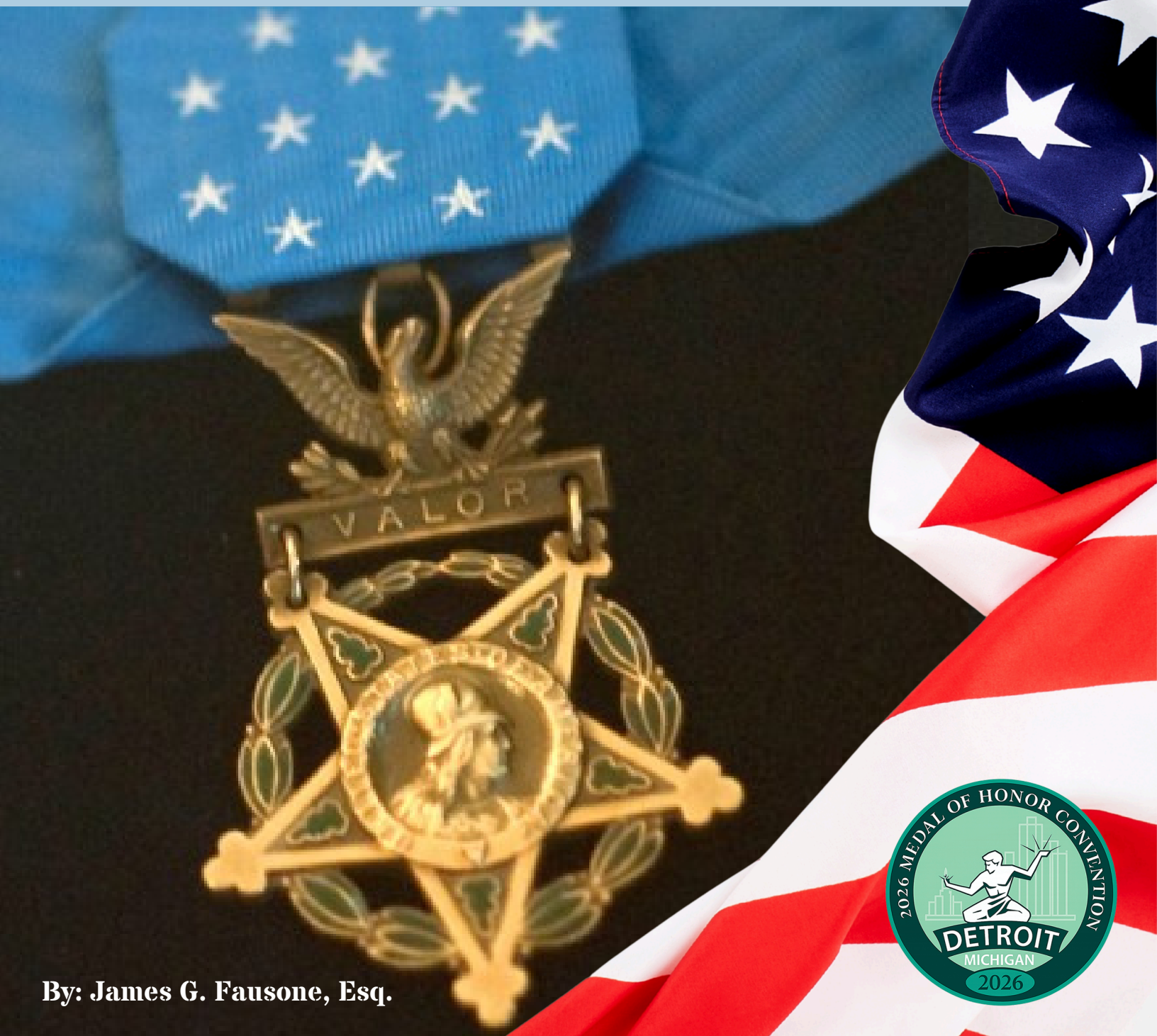
MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS ARE JUST LIKE YOU!



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2026 MEDAL OF HONOR CONVENTION
DETROIT
MICHIGAN
2026

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

This book was created to support the 2026 Congressional Medal of Honor Society convention to be held in Detroit, Michigan in late September 2026. This book's short stories highlight as of 2025 the 61 living Medal of Honor recipients. It shows how these men are just like you.

They are regular people who did extraordinary acts when in the service of the Country. We hope you are inspired to rise to the occasion when it presents itself to serve your fellow Americans, even if it's just in everyday activities. You can be a hero to your fellow Americans.

As you read these stories look for the commonalities. You find a number of common traits: growing up in a supportive environment, looking for a purpose in life, and learning early on about values like loyalty and determination. You will also note that some of these awards were shortly after the battle, but some took over 50 years to be recognized by review panels. This was particularly true for minority soldiers. You will also find that these men have full lives after service. Some remain very private and some focus on business, veteran and family issues.

Many of these men have also expressed in writing or interviews that wearing the Medal of Honor can be a burden. It is a wonderful and terrible burden. Each expresses that the medal is not just about them but about the men that were lost and the team that survived.

You should also see that even when living with physical or emotional wounds it is possible to get to the other side and have a good life. It often takes the strength to ask for help in the form of doctors, physical therapists, mental health professionals, family and mentors.

Mentioned herein are books by the recipients and movies their actions have inspired. Reading or watching may provide you a deeper understanding of the men and their actions. The internet is full of details on the specific battles. The order of the stories are based on conflict and the year the medal was awarded.

There are over 3500 men (and one woman) who have received the Medal of Honor. This book simply captures the currently living 61 recipients. They are from the Vietnam War and the Global War on Terror, primarily in Afghanistan. The book's short biographies are captured in that order. You can learn more about all of the recipients by doing a little searching on the internet or reading books written on or by the men.

I want to recognize the support and information provided by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. You can obtain more information about each of the recipients at its website

www.cmohs.org. We hope these abbreviated stories on each recipient will prompt you to go to the internet and search more about them. The Society gave permission to use the medal citations and select photographs used in this book. The citations are written in typical stilted government award language.

If you want to support the Detroit based Congressional Medal of Honor Society Convention in 2026 you can visit www.medalofhonordetroit.com.

It is also with a generous spirit that military authors shared their work for this project. In particular C. Douglas Sterner, Dwight Zimmerman, Deborah Maulding and Scott Baron. You can find more about their work on the internet. Each author also writes with a military author collective focused on stories of military heroes in a book series called Beyond Belief: Stories that Defy Comprehension. These books are available on Amazon. Doug Sterner, a prolific military writer, leads that project and made the collective works available.

Some of the material in this book comes from interviews conducted on Veterans Radio. Over 22 years, hosts Dale Throneberry and I have been able to interview many Medal of Honor recipients. These www.veteransradio.org podcast interviews are available on the internet and give a human touch to these men beyond the battle. The interviews provide a sense how humble and normal these men are today. At the end a few Veterans Radio interviews are included about the history of the Medal of Honor and some unique insights.

I also want to thank Legal Help for Veterans, PLLC for its support and resources in putting this collection of stories together. Without its staff, resources and passion for veterans, this book would not have been produced. Check out www.legalhelpforveterans.com which is focused on VA disability claims and appeals for veterans.

James G. Fausone, Esq.

VIETNAM WAR MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS

Bruce P. Crandall

All American Baseball Player with Technical Aptitude

Bruce Crandall (via Wikimedia Commons Commons, Public domain)

Bruce R. Crandall was born in Olympia, Washington on February 17, 1933. It sits on South Puget Sound and is 50 miles southwest of Seattle. He had an early interest in flying, engineering, and exploration. Bruce graduated from Olympia High School in 1951, where he played sports and was an All-American baseball player. But he did not graduate from college at that time. He took college courses in civil engineering, before being drafted into the Army during the Korean War in 1953. The Army ended his dream of a pro baseball career and started an Army career.

His technical aptitude and mathematical ability later helped him qualify for Army Engineer Officer Candidate School (OCS) and specialized flight training. Bruce completed fixed-wing and rotary-wing flight school, becoming an aviation officer and mapping pilot. He had a great time piloting a mapping aircraft for the Army Topographic Command in exotic locations such as: Alaska, North Africa, South America, Central America and the Middle East.

Then world events placed him in Vietnam after he learned how to fly Army helicopters. In 1965, he was in the Battle of la Drang. As a Major commanding an air assault helicopter company (Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division), Crandall flew 22 missions under heavy enemy fire on November 14, 1965, delivering ammunition and evacuating over 70 wounded soldiers from LZ X-Ray. His wingman was Captain Ed “Too Tall To Fly” Freeman of Mississippi. They received Silver Stars for their actions. Those were later upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

His actions directly saved lives and helped prevent the annihilation of U.S. forces pinned down in the first major battle between U.S. and North Vietnamese regulars. He completed a second combat tour as Operations Officer for the 1st Cavalry Division aviation group during the period 1966-1968.

He was presented with a medal by President George W. Bush on February 26, 2007.

His citation reads:

> Major Bruce Crandall distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism as a Flight Commander in the Republic of Vietnam while serving with Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). On 14 November 1965, his flight of sixteen helicopters was lifting troops for a search and destroy mission from Plei Me, Vietnam, to Landing Zone X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley. On the fourth troop lift, the enemy had Landing Zone X-Ray targeted. As Major Crandall and the first eight helicopters landed to discharge troops on his fifth troop lift, his unarmed helicopter came under such intense enemy fire that the ground commander ordered the second flight of eight aircraft to abort their mission. As Major Crandall flew back to Plei Me, his base of operations, he determined that the ground commander of the besieged infantry battalion desperately needed more ammunition. Major Crandall then decided to adjust his base of operations to Artillery Firebase Falcon in order to shorten the flight distance to deliver ammunition and evacuate wounded soldiers. While medical evacuation was not his mission, he immediately sought volunteers and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, led the two aircraft to Landing Zone X-Ray. Despite the fact that the landing zone was still under relentless enemy fire, Major Crandall landed and proceeded to supervise the loading of seriously wounded soldiers aboard the aircraft. Major Crandall's voluntary decision to land under the most extreme fire instilled in the other pilots the will and spirit to continue to land their own aircraft, and in the ground forces the realization that they would be resupplied and that friendly wounded would be promptly evacuated. This greatly enhanced morale and the will to fight at a critical time. After his first medical evacuation, Major Crandall continued to fly into and out of the landing zone throughout the day and into the evening. That day he completed a total of 22 flights, most under intense enemy fire, retiring from the battlefield only after all possible service had been rendered to the Infantry battalion. His actions provided critical resupply of ammunition and evacuation of the wounded. Major Crandall's daring acts of bravery and courage in the face of an overwhelming and determined enemy are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.

After Vietnam, Crandall served in various Army aviation leadership, training, and management positions. Bruce was focused on aviation safety programs and rotary-wing development as the Army transitioned to more advanced helicopter technology. He retired from the U.S. Army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel after 24 years of service.

Beyond Service

What does a MOH recipient do after military service? He continued his education obtaining a masters degree from Golden State University. Bruce Crandall continued to apply his engineering and logistics expertise to civilian roles, including Director of Public Works in Mesa, Arizona, and later in California cities such as Sacramento and Santa Rosa. He managed infrastructure planning, public utilities, and city development projects.

Crandall and Freeman's actions were captured in a 2002 book by Lt. Gen. Hal Moore and Joe Galloway titled, "We Were Soldiers Once, and Young." which was turned into a movie of the same name starring Mel Gibson.

Crandall (right) and Medal of Honor recipient Leroy Petry (left) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, June 24, 2013 (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Robert J. Modrzejewski

Polish Descent - Joins for Education

As a kid with Polish parents, Robert's life was shaped by his ethnic background and need to get a head in life. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on July 3, 1934.

Robert Joseph Modrzejewski, USMC (Retired); Medal of Honor recipient for heroic action during the Vietnam War (via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

In the 1930s, the Polish community in Milwaukee, centered on the South Side "Polonia," was a close-knit, self-sufficient community that maintained a strong cultural identity, though it was also experiencing pressures from economic hardship and changing demographics. The community was characterized by its thriving religious and cultural institutions, particularly Catholic churches, and a strong emphasis on homeownership, which led to the development of distinctive Polish flat housing. While many Polish-speakers remained within the community, some, especially those in the workforce, were beginning to learn English. The 1930s were a time of hard economics with the Great Depression still ravaging the country and families.

Robert was a good student, and he graduated from Casimir Pulaski High School in Milwaukee in 1953. His classmates were primarily of working-class Polish descent. To the immigrant community education was important.

He first attended Wisconsin State Teachers College (now part of the University of Wisconsin system) prior to entering the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM). He earned a Bachelor of Science in Education from the UWM in 1957. Later in life, he earned a master's degree in education from Pepperdine University in 1976.

Like many students of limited income, while still a college student, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve in 1955 through the Platoon Leaders Class. Upon graduation in June 1957, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve and then joined active duty.

He served continuously in the U.S. Marine Corps until his retirement as a Colonel in August 1986. During his 29 years of service, he held a variety of positions from the field to staff and command spots.

During combat in the Vietnam War from July 15 to 18, 1966 then-Captain Modrzejewski commanded Company K, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division during Operation Hastings in Quang Tri Province, Republic of Vietnam - a major effort to block North Vietnamese Army (NVA) infiltration routes. Shortly after landing in dense, enemy-controlled jungle, Modrzejewski's company encountered a well-entrenched NVA platoon. He led a direct assault that successfully seized a fortified enemy position, capturing significant ammunition and supplies. Over the next two and a half days, his unit was repeatedly counterattacked by numerically superior enemy forces. Despite being outnumbered, surrounded, low on ammunition, and facing heavy casualties, Modrzejewski's personal courage and tactical skill enabled his Marines to repel each assault. He was wounded in close quarters combat, yet refused evacuation. At one point, he crawled more than 200 meters under heavy fire to deliver ammunition to an isolated element of his command.

He received the Medal of Honor for action in Vietnam during the 1966 Operation Hastings during which the US Army was pushing back the People's Army of Vietnam to the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

He was awarded the medal by President Lydon Johnson on March 12,1968.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On 15 July 1966, during Operation Hastings, Company K was landed in an enemy-infested jungle area to establish a blocking position at a major enemy trail network. Shortly after landing, the company encountered a reinforced enemy platoon in a well-organized, defensive position. Maj. Modrzejewski led his men in the successful seizure of the enemy redoubt, which contained large quantities of ammunition and supplies. That evening, a numerically superior enemy force counterattacked in an effort to retake the vital supply area, thus setting the pattern of activity for the next 2 1/2 days. In the first series of attacks, the enemy assaulted repeatedly in overwhelming numbers, but each time was repulsed by the gallant marines. The second night, the enemy struck in battalion strength, and Maj. Modrzejewski was wounded in this intensive action which was fought at close quarters. Although exposed to enemy fire, and despite his painful wounds, he crawled 200 meters to provide critically needed ammunition to an exposed element of his command and was constantly present wherever the fighting was heaviest, despite numerous casualties, a dwindling supply of ammunition and the knowledge that they were surrounded, he skillfully directed artillery fire to within a few meters of his position and courageously inspired the efforts of his company in repelling the aggressive enemy attack. On 18 July, Company K was attacked by a regimental size enemy force. Although his unit was vastly outnumbered and weakened by the previous fighting, Maj. Modrzejewski reorganized his men and calmly moved among them to encourage and direct their efforts to heroic limits as they fought to overcome the vicious enemy onslaught. Again, he called in air and artillery strikes

> at close range with devastating effect on the enemy, which together with the bold and determined fighting of the men of Company K, repulsed the fanatical attack of the larger North Vietnamese force. His unparalleled personal heroism and indomitable leadership inspired his men to a significant victory over the enemy force and reflected great credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the U.S. Naval Service.

Beyond Service

In his post-combat career, he held important leadership/mentoring positions - for example, he was assigned to command the Marine Barracks at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis after his Vietnam tour.

Upon retirement, he moved to California with his wife Diane Evelyn and their son Michael Robert. He maintains a private life.

Jose Rodela

Large family, Mexican-American Warrior, Postal Carrier

Jose Rodela was born in Corpus Christi, Texas on June 15, 1937. He is of Mexican-American heritage. He grew up in the La Quarenta neighborhood of Corpus Christi, Texas - as the eldest of 12 children. He attended Zavala Elementary School and Driscoll Middle School in Corpus Christi. Jose attended Roy Miller High School in Corpus Christi. Times were difficult and he worked in restaurants and in the fields during his youth. According to one source, he left school during his sophomore year (10th grade) to enlist in the U.S. Army. The options for full-time work and pay were limited. So, he enlisted in the U.S. Army in September 1955 at the age of 17. This was a path to a better life. He served until 1975, retiring with the rank of Master Sergeant.

Rodela during his time of service (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

His most noted action was on September 1, 1969, in Phuoc Long Province, Vietnam, while serving with Detachment B-36, Company A, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Then a Company Commander with Special Forces, Detachment B-36, Rodela and his company of Cambodian soldiers came under brutal assault. For 18 continuous hours, they were engaged in a firefight against a much larger enemy force. The odds were grim, the battlefield chaotic.

Despite being wounded by shrapnel, Rodela repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire - not once, not twice, but throughout the entire engagement. He moved across the battlefield under fire to attend to wounded soldiers, reorganize his defensive perimeter, and take out a hostile rocket position that was devastating his unit.

His actions were overlooked for decades. Maybe it was because he was Mexican American, or just an enlisted guy or some bureaucratic reason. His valor was overlooked for decades, a wrong finally made right through the Pentagon's review of valor awards, particularly for minority veterans.

Though the battle took place in 1969, it wasn't until March 18, 2014, that Jose Rodela was formally awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama during a White House ceremony.

Rodela receives the Medal of Honor at a White House ceremony on March 18, 2014 (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

His citation reads:

> Sergeant First Class Jose Rodela distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as the company commander, Detachment B-36, Company A, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces during combat operations against an armed enemy in Phuoc Long Province, Republic of Vietnam on September 1, 1969. That afternoon, Sergeant First Class Rodela's battalion came under an intense barrage of mortar, rocket, and machine gun fire. Ignoring the withering enemy fire, Sergeant First Class Rodela immediately began placing his men into defensive positions to prevent the enemy from overrunning the entire battalion. Repeatedly exposing himself to enemy fire, Sergeant First Class Rodela moved from position to position, providing suppressing fire and assisting wounded, and was himself wounded in the back and head by a B-40 rocket while recovering a wounded comrade. Alone, Sergeant First Class Rodela assaulted and knocked out the B-40 rocket position before successfully returning to the battalion's perimeter. Sergeant First Class Rodela's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

After retiring from the Army in 1975, Rodela worked as a mail handler for the U.S. Postal Service in Corpus Christi and San Antonio, Texas. He maintains a private life with little known about any spouse or children.

Patrick H. Brady

Kicked Out of ROTC but Medevac Hero

Patrick H. Brady was born October 1, 1936, in Philip, South Dakota. The family moved to Washington State in his childhood. He was from a large Irish Catholic family. He attended O'Dea High School in Seattle, Washington - described as an all-boys school run by the Congregation of Christian Brothers. This Irish order believed in strong discipline and academic achievement. A lackluster student in high school but on two occasions he rescued friends from danger (a climbing accident and a near drowning incident) foreshadowing his future.

Brigadier General Patrick H. Brady, United States Army, Medal of Honor recipient (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

He enrolled at Seattle University (in Seattle). He graduated in 1959 with a bachelor's degree in psychology from Seattle University. He also later earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame) between 1970-1972.

While at Seattle University, he initially disliked the compulsory Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program and was kicked out. He later rejoined the program because he anticipated being drafted and wanted to enter as an officer. After junior year, he married Nancy Parsek, a fellow student, and turned his senior year into a year of academic and extracurricular excellence.

He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps on March 20, 1959. He entered active duty and began his Army career in West Berlin (Germany) with the 6th Infantry Brigade (September 1959–August 1961) and various assignments including Motor Pool Officer and detachment command within the 279th Station Hospital in West Berlin. None of these initial assignments were glamorous or suggesting valor.

The Army had a need for helicopter pilots in Vietnam and was retooling interested officers. Brady trained as a helicopter pilot at the U.S. Army Aviation School at Fort Rucker (Alabama), earning his wings in December 1963. He served two tours in the Vietnam War as a "Dustoff" (medevac helicopter) pilot: first tour January 1964–January 1965 with the 57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance) and second tour 1967-68 with the 54th Medical Detachment.

On January 6, 1968, near Chu Lai, Republic of Vietnam, he volunteered to fly into extremely hazardous conditions and evacuated 51 wounded soldiers in one day, actions for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

He flew over 2,000 combat missions and evacuated more than 5,000 wounded during his Vietnam tours. He retired from the U.S. Army on September 1, 1993, having achieved the rank of a two-star Major General.

He received his medal from President Richard Nixon on October 9, 1969.

President Richard Nixon presenting the Medal of Honor to Patrick Brady
(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Maj. Brady distinguished himself while serving in the Republic of Vietnam commanding a UH-1H ambulance helicopter, volunteered to rescue wounded men from a site in enemy-held territory which was reported to be heavily defended and to be blanketed by fog. To reach the site, he descended through heavy fog and smoke and hovered slowly along a valley trail, turning his ship sideward to blow away the fog with the backwash from his rotor blades. Despite the unchallenged, close-range enemy fire, he found the dangerously small site, where he successfully landed and evacuated two badly wounded South Vietnamese soldiers. He was then called to another area completely covered by dense fog where American casualties lay only 50 meters from the enemy. Two aircraft had previously been shot down, and others had made unsuccessful attempts to reach this site earlier in the day. With unmatched skill and extraordinary courage, Maj. Brady made four flights to this embattled landing zone and successfully rescued all of the wounded. On his third mission of the day, Maj. Brady once again

landed at a site surrounded by the enemy. The friendly ground force, pinned down by enemy fire, had been unable to reach and secure the landing zone. Although his aircraft had been badly damaged and his controls partially shot away during his initial entry into this area, he returned minutes later and rescued the remaining injured. Shortly thereafter obtaining a replacement aircraft, Maj. Brady was requested to land in an enemy mine field where a platoon of American soldiers was trapped. A mine detonated near his helicopter, wounding two crew members and damaging his ship. In spite of this, he managed to fly six severely injured patients to medical aid. Throughout that day Maj. Brady utilized three helicopters to evacuate a total of 51 seriously wounded men, many of whom would have perished without prompt medical treatment. Maj. Brady's bravery was in the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

He married Nancy (Nancy Lee Parsek) - his high school sweetheart from Seattle. Like traditional Irish Catholics, they had six children. - One of his children, Meghan, served as an officer in the Medical Service Corps (with duty in Kosovo and the 1991 Iraq War) and helped to co-author a book of Brady's exploits "Dead Men Flying: Victory in Viet Nam The Legend of Dust Off: America's Battlefield Angels."

After his military career, he remained active in veterans' affairs and public service. For example, he served as chairman of the Citizens Flag Alliance (a coalition of organizations determined to protect the American flag from physical desecration); was a commissioner of American Battle Monuments Commission and president of Congressional Medal of Honor Society. He has been inducted into the Dustoff Association Hall of Fame (17 February 2001) and the National Aviation Hall of Fame (2013).

James A. Taylor

California Boy To Mustang

Born at the end of the Great Depression, James Allen Taylor was born on December 31, 1937, in Humboldt County, California. There is little information about his family. He likely graduated in 1955 from Arcata Union High School in Arcata, California. In 1956, at the age of 18 he enlisted in the U.S. Army where he served until 1980 and retired as a Major. While in high school he was an Arcata Tiger in high school, he later became an Army Mustang.

He served 10 years as an enlisted soldier before being selected for and completing Officer Candidate School and being commissioned as an officer. Those that move from enlisted to officer are known as Mustangs. Along the way he obtained a college degree, a Bachelor of Science in Criminology from University of Tampa.

As a freshly minted first lieutenant, he was in the famous Americal division and detailed to Vietnam. On 9 November 1967, near Que Son, Republic of Vietnam, First Lieutenant James A. Taylor served as executive officer of Troop B, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry, during a reconnaissance mission when his unit was suddenly ambushed by a well-concealed enemy force. Despite intense automatic weapons fire, Taylor repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to direct his men, evacuate the wounded, and organize defensive positions. When friendly elements were pinned down, he led counterattacks to relieve pressure and recover casualties. Even after being wounded, Taylor refused evacuation and continued to lead until the enemy was driven off, saving numerous lives through conspicuous gallantry.

For actions west of Que Son, Republic of Vietnam, on November 9, 1967, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. He received his medal from President Lyndon Johnson on November 19, 1968.

Taylor (fourth from left) receiving the Medal of Honor from President Lyndon B. Johnson along with four fellow recipients: Gary Wetzel, Dwight H. Johnson, Sammy L. Davis, and Charles Liteky. (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

His Citation reads:

> Capt. Taylor, Armor, was serving as executive officer of Troop B, 1st Squadron. His troop was engaged in an attack on a fortified position west of Que Son when it came under intense enemy recoilless-rifle, mortar, and automatic-weapons fire from an enemy strong point located immediately to its front. One armored cavalry assault vehicle was hit immediately by recoilless-rifle fire and all five crewmembers were wounded. Aware that the stricken vehicle was in grave danger of exploding, Capt. Taylor rushed forward and personally extracted the wounded to safety despite the hail of enemy fire and exploding ammunition. Within minutes a second armored cavalry assault vehicle was hit by multiple recoilless-rifle rounds. Despite the continuing intense enemy fire, Capt. Taylor moved forward on foot to rescue the wounded men from the burning vehicle and personally removed all the crewmen to the safety of a nearby dike. Moments later the vehicle exploded. As he was returning to his vehicle, a bursting mortar round painfully wounded Capt. Taylor yet he valiantly returned to his vehicle to relocate the medical evacuation zone to an area closer to the front lines. As he was moving his vehicle, it came under machine- gun fire from an enemy position not 50 yards away. Capt. Taylor engaged the position with his machine gun, killing the three-man crew. Upon arrival at the new evacuation site, still another vehicle was struck. Once again Capt. Taylor rushed forward and pulled the wounded from the vehicle, loaded them aboard his vehicle, and returned them safely to the evacuation site. His actions of unsurpassed valor were a source of inspiration to his entire troop, contributed significantly to the success of the overall assault on the enemy position, and were directly responsible for saving the lives of a number of his fellow soldiers. His actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military profession and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

After service, and his selfless actions to save lives, James A. Taylor retreated to a life of privacy away from the public eye.

John J. Duffy

Green Beret & Poet

John J. Duffy was born on 16 March 1938 in Brooklyn, New York. He left high school and enlisted in the U.S. Army in March 1955 shortly after turning 17. There is little public information about his family and life prior to the military. He demonstrated aptitude and attitude as an enlisted soldier. He was encouraged to go to officer candidate school.

John J. Duffy
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

By 1963, Duffy had earned his commission as an officer. After his commissioning, he joined the 5th Special Forces Group ("Green Berets"). As a Special Forces officer, he would have received specialized training (e.g., parachute, special operations, advisory roles).

Duffy served four combat tours in South Vietnam approximately 1967, 1968, 1971, and 1973.

During his service in Vietnam, he worked as a "Senior Advisor" to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) unit, specifically the 11th Airborne Battalion, 2nd Brigade, Airborne Division. His decisive action took place 14-15 April 1972 during the Easter Offensive, where he displayed extraordinary leadership under fire. Major John J. Duffy served as senior U.S. advisor to an isolated ARVN airborne battalion at Fire Support Base Charlie. After the battalion commander was killed and the command post destroyed, Duffy assumed effective control. Despite being wounded multiple times, he repeatedly refused evacuation, exposed himself to enemy fire to direct air strikes and artillery, and coordinated the defense against heavy bombardment and ground assaults. When the position became untenable, he organized a fighting withdrawal, repelled an ambush, directed helicopter evacuations, and was the last to leave, ensuring all others were safely extracted.

After a review for medal upgrades, he received the Medal of Honor from President Joseph Biden on July 5, 2022.

His citation reads:

> Major John J. Duffy distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as the Senior Advisor to the 11th Airborne Battalion, 2d Brigade, Airborne Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam in the Republic of Vietnam, during the period of 14 to 15 April 1972. In the two days

preceding the events of 14 to 15 April 1972, the commander of the 11th Airborne Battalion was killed, the battalion command post was destroyed, and Major Duffy was twice wounded but refused to be evacuated. Then on 14 April, Major Duffy directed the defense of Fire Support Base Charlie, which was surrounded by a battalion-size enemy element. In the morning hours, after a failed effort to establish a landing zone for resupply aircraft, he moved close to enemy anti-aircraft positions to call in airstrikes. At this time, Major Duffy was again wounded by fragments from a recoilless rifle round and again refused medical evacuation. Shortly thereafter, the enemy began an artillery bombardment on the base and he remained in an exposed position to direct gunships onto the enemy positions which eventually silenced the enemy fire. Following the bombardment, Major Duffy assessed the conditions on the base and personally ensured the wounded friendly foreign soldiers were moved to positions of relative safety and the remaining ammunition was appropriately distributed to the remaining defenders. Shortly thereafter, the enemy resumed indirect fire on the base, expending an estimated 300 rounds. Nevertheless, he remained in an exposed position to direct gunship fire on the enemy positions. In the late afternoon hours, the enemy began a ground assault from all sides of the firebase and Major Duffy moved from position to position to adjust fire, spot targets for artillery observers, and ultimately to direct gunship fire on a friendly position which had been compromised. As the evening wore on, it became clear that the defenders could not withstand the overwhelming enemy forces and he began to organize an evacuation of the firebase under the cover of night. With the goal of a complete withdrawal, Major Duffy was the last man off the base, remaining behind to adjust the covering fire from gunships until the last possible moment. When the acting battalion commander was wounded, he assumed command of the evacuation and maintained communication with the available air support to direct fire on the enemy. In the early morning hours of 15 April, the enemy ambushed the Battalion inflicting additional casualties and scattering some of the able-bodied soldiers. Major Duffy organized defensive positions during the ambush and ensured the friendly foreign forces could successfully repulse the enemy. After withstanding the ambush, he led the evacuees, many of whom were significantly wounded, to an established evacuation area, despite being continually pursued by the enemy. Upon reaching the exfiltration site, Major Duffy directed gunship fire on enemy positions and marked a landing zone for the helicopters. Only after ensuring all of the evacuees were aboard, did Major Duffy board while also assisting a wounded friendly foreign soldier in with him. Once on board, he administered aid to a helicopter door gunner who had been wounded during the evacuation. Major Duffy's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

Duffy retired as a Major from the US Army after approximately 22 years of service. Duffy moved into business (publishing & investment) and creative writing (poetry), along with ongoing engagement with veteran/special-ops communities.

He became president of a publishing company. He founded and served as president of an investment/discount-brokerage firm, which was later acquired by TD Ameritrade. He turned to writing poetry. He published six books of poetry. He has been recognized as a poet in veteran/VA publications, using his experiences of combat and service as inspiration.

He was a founding member of the Special Operations Association and was inducted into the Infantry OCS Hall of Fame at Fort Benning (Georgia) in 2013.

Jay R. Vargas

Baseball Player to Soldier

U.S. Marine Col. Jay Vargas
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Manuel Vargas, Jr., was born on July 29, 1938, in Winslow, Arizona. He later changed his name legally to Jay R. Vargas and has long been called Jr. Vargas. His Italian mother, Maria Teresa Sandona Vargas was born in Italy, and his father, Manuel Victorio Vargas, Sr. was Spanish. Deborah Maulding wrote: "Jay attended school in Winslow, Arizona, where he was an outstanding All-State athlete in baseball. Jay attended Northern Arizona University on both an academic and a sports scholarship. Jay was voted the Homecoming King in 1960.

Vargas joined the Class A Portland team of the Los Angeles Dodgers club, advancing to the Double A level during his time there, and also achieving the title of Most Valuable Player (MVP). Although he loved baseball, he noticed his vision changing, making it harder to play at the Double A level and realized a professional career was unlikely to happen.

In 1962, the Los Angeles Dodgers professional team included Don Drysdale, Sandy Koufax and others who were icons of the sport. It is understandable that Vargas would return home discouraged. His father, who Jay described as "very patient" said "God, how many kids really get that far. Look at it that way."

Manuel Vargas encouraged his son to continue to focus on academic work. Jay graduated in 1962 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and then decided to trade the baseball uniform for a different uniform. Jay's mother, Maria Teresa Sandona Vargas encouraged him to join the Air Force and was disappointed when he chose to follow the footsteps of his brothers, and join the United States Marine Corps."

Jay Vargas graduated from Officer Basic School at Quantico, Virginia and was commissioned in 1962. In June of 1963 he was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division. Vargas' most significant combat service took place during the Vietnam War, specifically with Company G, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 3rd Marine Division (Reinforced) in the Quảng Trị Province of South Vietnam.

During the period 30 April to 2 May 1968, Vargas commanded Company G in one of the fiercest engagements of the Vietnam War at the fortified villages of Dai Do and Dinh Tô in Quảng Trị Province. During the period 30 April to 2 May 1968, Vargas commanded Company G in one of the fiercest engagements of the Vietnam War at the fortified villages of Dai Do and Dinh Tô in

Quảng Trị Province. On 1 May 1968, although wounded, he combined his company with two others and led an attack on the fortified village of Dai Do, maneuvering his Marines across about 700 meters of open rice paddy under intense mortar, rocket, and artillery fire. His elements became pinned down by intense enemy fire, but he personally led a reserve platoon to assist them, destroyed multiple enemy bunkers, and refused medical aid while reorganizing his unit into a strong defensive perimeter. After securing the initial objective, the enemy launched multiple counterattacks and probes through the night; Vargas stayed with his Marines, directing defense, and the next morning led the renewed assault from Dai Do into Dinh Tô, where brutal hand-to-hand combat occurred.

Lieutenant Colonel Jay Vargas with Medal of Honor (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

When his battalion commander was seriously wounded, Vargas, despite his own wounds and pain, crossed a fire-swept area, carried his commander to cover, then resumed supervising, encouraging his men, and helping organize the battalion's perimeter defense. His leadership under fire, disregard for his own safety, care for his men, and persistent aggressiveness in the face of overwhelming enemy fire were deemed "above and beyond the call of duty."

He was presented the medal by President Richard Nixon on May 14, 1970.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Commanding Officer, Company G, Second Battalion, Fourth Marines, Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade, Third Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in action against enemy forces at Dai Do, Quảng Trị Province, Republic of Vietnam, from 30 April to 2 May 1968. On 1 May 1968, though suffering from wounds he had incurred while relocating his unit under heavy enemy fire the preceding day, Major Vargas combined Company G with two other companies and led his men in an attack on the fortified village of Dai Do. Exercising expert leadership, he maneuvered his Marines across 700 meters of open rice paddy while under intense enemy mortar, rocket and artillery fire and obtained a foothold in two hedgerows on the enemy perimeter, only to have elements of his company become pinned down by the intense enemy fire. Leading his reserve platoon to the aid of his beleaguered men, Major Vargas inspired his men to renew their relentless advance, while destroying a number of enemy bunkers. Again, wounded by grenade fragments, he refused aid as he moved about the hazardous area reorganizing his unit into a strong defense perimeter at the edge of the village. Shortly after the objective was secured the enemy commenced a series of counterattacks and probes which lasted throughout the night but were

unsuccessful as the gallant defenders of Company G stood firm in their hard-won enclave. Reinforced the following morning, the Marines launched a renewed assault through Dai Do on the village of Dinh To, to which the enemy retaliated with a massive counterattack resulting in hand-to-hand combat. Major Vargas remained in the open, encouraging and rendering assistance to his Marines when he was hit for the third time in the three-day battle. Observing his battalion commander sustain a serious wound, he disregarded his excruciating pain, crossed the fire-swept area and carried his commander to a covered position, then resumed supervising and encouraging his men while simultaneously assisting in organizing the battalion's perimeter defense. His gallant actions uphold the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Vargas had his medal inscribed with his Italian mother's name. She was only the second woman to have that honor. (Dr Mary Edwards Walker, Civil War physician, was the first and only woman to receive the medal.) He retired from the Marine Corps in 1992, with the rank of Colonel, after nearly 30 years of service.

Beyond Service

Jay Vargas married Dorothy Jean "Dottie" Johnson in 1963 and had three daughters.

Vargas continued his education at the United States International University San Diego, California, where he completed his Master of Arts Degree with honors. He also received an Honorary Doctoral Degree from Northern Arizona University.

After retiring as a Colonel from active-duty Vargas became actively involved in veteran affairs and public service. From 1993 to 1998, he served as Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA). In July 2001, he was appointed as Regional Veterans Liaison for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), a position he held until January 2009. In his liaison role, his region covered the western United States (19 states), as well as territories like Guam and the Philippines.

He also engaged in broader veteran advocacy, working with organizations like the Gary Sinise Foundation, supporting wounded veterans and mental-health campaigns for service members. He received honors from the American Academy of Achievement and National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Thomas G. Kelley

Big Irish Catholic Family, Lost an Eye, Continued to Serve

Kelley, Thomas Gunning
(courtesy of HomeofHeroes.com)

Thomas Gunning Kelley was born on May 13, 1939, in Boston, Massachusetts. His father was John Basil Kelley, a schoolteacher and later a principal. His mother was Elizabeth Gunning. He grew up in a Roman Catholic household in Boston neighborhoods with Irish influences. He was one of a large family - an article says his mother "had thirteen children". Kelley attended Boston College High School (a Jesuit high school in Boston) and graduated in the Class of 1956. A college education was important to his parents, and he attended College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts graduating with a BS in Economics in 1960.

He joined the U.S. Navy soon after college in June 1960 via Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island. His early service included assignments as a surface warfare officer on ships such as the USS Davis (DD-937) and the USS Stickell (DD-888). He volunteered for river-operations in Vietnam, joining the riverine forces in the Mekong Delta and taking command of River Assault Division 152.

On June 15, 1969, in Ong Muong Canal, Kien Hoa Province, South Vietnam, Kelley was commanding River Assault Division 152 during a mission to extract a U.S. Army infantry company from the canal's east bank.

As his force of eight river assault craft (monitors and troop carriers) was in the process, one of the armored troop carriers had a mechanical failure: its loading ramp failed to retract, immobilizing it. At nearly the same moment enemy forces (Viet Cong) opened fire from the opposite bank.

Recognizing extreme danger to the disabled craft and to his column, Kelley ordered the remaining boats to form a protective cordon around the disabled craft. He then boldly maneuvered his own monitor vessel into the exposed side of that cordon - placing his boat between the enemy fire and his men - to draw enemy attention and provide cover.

Shortly after, a rocket or RPG scored a direct hit on the coxswain's flat, penetrating thick armor and spraying shrapnel in all directions. Kelley sustained serious head wounds, was thrown to the deck, and was unable to speak clearly into the radio. Despite his injuries, unable to stand, he continued to direct the other boats via one of his men relaying commands until the enemy attack was suppressed and the craft were able to withdraw to safety. Only then did he order medical evacuation.

He received the medal from President Richard Nixon on May 14, 1970.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in the afternoon while serving as commander of River Assault Division 152 during combat operations against enemy aggressor forces. Lt. Comdr. (then Lt.) Kelley was in charge of a column of eight river assault craft which were extracting one company of U.S. Army infantry troops on the east bank of the Ong Muong Canal in Kien Hoa Province, when one of the armored troop carriers reported a mechanical failure of a loading ramp. At approximately the same time, Viet Cong forces opened fire from the opposite bank of the canal. After issuing orders for the crippled troop carrier to raise its ramp manually, and for the remaining boats to form a protective cordon around the disabled craft, Lt. Comdr. Kelley, realizing the extreme danger to his column and its inability to clear the ambush site until the crippled unit was repaired, boldly maneuvered the monitor in which he was embarked to the exposed side of the protective cordon in direct line with the enemy's fire, and ordered the monitor to commence firing. Suddenly, an enemy rocket scored a direct hit on the coxswain's flat, the shell penetrating the thick armor plate, and the explosion spraying shrapnel in all directions. Sustaining serious head wounds from the blast, which hurled him to the deck of the monitor, Lt. Comdr. Kelley disregarded his severe injuries and attempted to continue directing the other boats. Although unable to move from the deck or to speak clearly into the radio, he succeeded in relaying his commands through one of his men until the enemy attack was silenced and the boats were able to move to an area of safety. Lt. Comdr. Kelley's brilliant leadership, bold initiative, and resolute determination served to inspire his men and provide the impetus needed to carry out the mission after he was medically evacuated by helicopter. His extraordinary courage under fire and his selfless devotion to duty sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Despite being severely wounded in 1969 that cost him an eye, Kelley successfully appealed to remain on active duty and continued his career. His subsequent naval assignments (after Vietnam) included executive officer of the USS Lang (FF-1060) and command positions such as the Military Sealift Command Far East in Yokohama. He retired with the rank of Captain in 1990, after 30 years of service.

Beyond Service

After leaving active duty, Kelley worked for a period as a civilian in the United States Department of Defense. In April 1999 he became the head of the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services (initially as Commissioner) and in August 2003 was named Secretary of that department. As Secretary he oversaw Massachusetts' programs for veterans: public assistance, education benefits for disabled veterans, annuities, and employment protections for returning service-members. He placed particular emphasis on unmet needs of post-9/11 veterans (such as Traumatic

Brain Injury, veteran suicide prevention) and hired younger disabled veterans to reach out to the new generation. He retired from his state public-service role in January 2011.

From 2015 to 2017, Kelley served as President of the Medal of Honor Society, advocating for living recipients and promoting its Character Development Program in schools.

Kelley in 2011
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

He remains active in veteran-related boards and initiatives: for example, he has served on the board of the Home Base Program (a collaboration of the Boston Red Sox Foundation & Massachusetts General Hospital that helps veterans with "invisible wounds" of war). He also supports mentorship, educational institutions (his alma mater College of the Holy Cross and his high school), and veteran ministries.

Kelley has received honorary Doctor of Laws from Boston University in 2012. In January 2023, the USS Thomas G. Kelley (DDG-140) was announced as the future guided-missile destroyer named in his honor.

Paris Davis

Ignored for Fifty Years, But Finally Recognized

Davis as a captain in the 1960s (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Paris Davis entered the world on May 13, 1939, in Cleveland, Ohio - an era marked by global turmoil, but also one in which the seeds of the civil rights movement were gaining strength. Davis grew up in a working-class community, shaped by the lessons of discipline, responsibility, and the understanding that one's worth was measured in deeds, not declarations. His drive, and a family push, carried him to Southern University in Baton Rouge, where he earned an ROTC scholarship and studied political science. Upon his commissioning in June 1959, Davis entered the U.S. Army at the dawn of a turbulent era, one that would shape both America's foreign policy and Davis's own destiny.

In the years that followed, he earned his Airborne and Ranger tabs (1960) and completed the grueling Special Forces qualification course in 1962 - a rite of passage that only a fraction of soldiers ever achieve. From early assignments in Korea and Okinawa to the escalating conflict in Vietnam, Davis's career became a testament to excellence in soldiering. By 1965 he was a captain, leading Detachment A-321 of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces - an elite role that required equal measures of tactical brilliance and moral courage.

It was in June of that year, near Bồng Sơn in Bình Định Province, that Davis's name would be etched into history. Over two days, June 17–18, 1965, Davis led a nighttime raid against a Viet Cong regimental headquarters. When his inexperienced South Vietnamese partner force was ambushed on the return, chaos erupted. Davis was wounded early in the fight but refused evacuation. He repeatedly crossed open ground under heavy enemy fire to rescue wounded comrades, including dragging his team sergeant across a field while the air around them erupted with enemy rounds. He coordinated supporting fires, refused morphine so he could remain alert, and would not leave the battlefield until every man - dead or alive - was accounted for. His actions were, as the Medal of Honor citation later recorded, "above and beyond the call of duty," yet for nearly six decades, the nation failed to formally recognize them.

In his Veterans Radio interview, Davis recounted this chapter of his life with both humility and clarity. He spoke of how his original Medal of Honor nomination was lost, how a second set of paperwork disappeared as well, and how advocates fought through layers of bureaucracy and time to restore what had been unjustly withheld. He described watching history move past him, year after year, while the memory of the battle remained as vivid as ever. "You don't do it for a medal,"

he said during the interview, “you do it for the men beside you. The medal… that came later.” After a Defense of Department award review, his medal was upgraded.

He received the medal from President Joe Biden, on March 3, 2023, in a ceremony that served as both a celebration and a correction to an institutional oversight intertwined with racial inequities of the era.

His citation reads:

> Captain Paris D. Davis, Commander, Detachment A-321, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as an advisor to the 883d Regional Force Company, Army of the Republic of Vietnam, during combat operations against an armed enemy in the vicinity of Bong Son, Republic of Vietnam, on June 17-18, 1965. Captain Davis and three other U.S. Special Forces advisors accompanied the Vietnamese 883d Regional Force Company on its first combat mission, a daring nighttime raid against a Viet Cong Regional Headquarters housing a superior enemy force. Captain Davis’ advice and leadership allowed the company to gain the tactical advantage, allowing it to surprise the unsuspecting enemy force and kill approximately 100 enemy soldiers. While returning from the successful raid, the Regional Force Company was ambushed and sustained several casualties. Captain Davis constantly exposed himself to hostile small arms fire to rally the inexperienced and disorganized company. He expertly directed both artillery and small arms fire, enabling other elements of the company to reach his position. Although wounded in the leg, he aided in the evacuation of other wounded men of his unit, but refused medical evacuation himself. Following the arrival of air support, Captain Davis directed artillery fire within 30 meters of his own position in an attempt to halt the enemy’s advance. Then, with complete disregard for his own life, he braved intense enemy fire to cross an open field to rescue his seriously wounded and immobilized team sergeant. While carrying the sergeant up a hill to a position of relative safety, Captain Davis was again wounded by enemy fire. Despite two painful wounds, Captain Davis again refused medical evacuation, remained with the troops, fought bravely, and provided pivotal leadership and inspiration to the Regional Force Company as they repelled several Viet Cong assaults on their position over a period of several hours. When friendly reinforcements finally arrived, Captain Davis again refused medical evacuation until he had recovered a U.S. advisor under his command who had been wounded during the initial ambush and presumed dead. While personally recovering the wounded soldier he found him severely wounded but still clinging to life. Captain Davis directed the helicopter extraction of his wounded colleague, not leaving the battlefield himself until after all friendly forces were recovered or medically evacuated. Captain Davis’ heroism and selflessness, above and beyond the call of duty at the risk of his own life, are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

After retiring from the Army as a Colonel in 1985, Davis became a newspaper publisher. He founded and operated the African-American weekly newspaper Metro Herald in Alexandria, Virginia, for about 30 years. He resides in the Northern Virginia / Washington, D.C. area (Virginia) in retirement. His honors include being inducted into the U.S. Army Ranger Hall of Fame in 2019.

Retired Army COL Paris D. Davis (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

At home, Davis was not simply a soldier or publisher but a father - “a proud father of three,” as those close to him have said. His children grew up knowing the quiet strength of a man who rarely spoke of his battlefield injuries or heroism. Only later, as media attention intensified around his Medal of Honor recognition, did they learn the full extent of what he endured in Vietnam. For Davis, family remained the constant through decades of service, struggle, and eventual recognition.

Harvey C. Barnum, Jr.

Class President to Marine Lifer

Harvey C. Barnum, Jr. in uniform (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Born in Cheshire, Connecticut on July 21, 1940, Harvey Barnum, Jr attended the local high school. His parents were Harold and Ann Barnum. He had a younger brother. Harvey was class president (both freshman and senior years) and active in football, baseball and Boy Scouts. He attended Saint Anselm College in New Hampshire where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Economics in June 1962.

Barnum was commissioned in June 1962 after graduating from college and joining the Marine Corps' Platoon Leaders Class program. In early December 1965 he was assigned to Vietnam on temporary duty, as an artillery forward observer with Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division (Reinforced). He later returned to Vietnam in October 1968 as Commanding Officer of Battery E, 2nd Battalion, 12th Marines, 3rd Marine Division, earning additional decorations including the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Vietnamese Gallantry Cross.

On 18 December 1965, near the village of Ky Phu, Quang Tin Province, Republic of Viet Nam, Barnum's company had been pinned down by extremely accurate enemy fire, and became separated by over 500 meters of open, fire-swept ground from the remainder of the battalion. Casualties within the company were mounting rapidly. Barnum made a hazardous reconnaissance of the surrounding area under fire, seeking targets for his artillery. He found the rifle company commander mortally wounded and the radio operator dead. He gave aid to the dying commander and then stripped the radio from the dead operator and strapped it to himself. He assumed command in that vacuum.

He received the medal on February 27, 1967, at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., presented by Sec. of the Navy Paul H. Nitze.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. When the company was suddenly pinned down by a hail of extremely accurate enemy fire and was quickly separated from the remainder of the battalion by over 500 meters of open and fire-swept ground and casualties mounted rapidly, Lt. Barnum quickly made a hazardous reconnaissance of the area, seeking targets for his artillery. Finding the rifle company commander mortally wounded

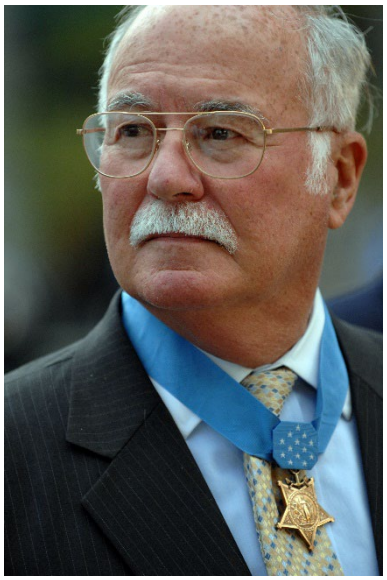
> and the radio operator killed, he, with complete disregard for his safety, gave aid to the dying commander, then removed the radio from the dead operator and strapped it to himself. He immediately assumed command of the rifle company, and moving at once into the midst of the heavy fire, rallying and giving encouragement to all units, reorganizing them to replace the loss of key personnel and lead their attack on enemy positions from which deadly fire continued to come. His sound and swift decisions and his obvious calm served to stabilize the badly decimated units and his gallant example as he stood exposed repeatedly to point out targets served as an inspiration to all. Provided with two armed helicopters, he moved fearlessly through enemy fire to control the air attacks against the firmly entrenched enemy while skillfully directing one platoon in a successful counterattack on the key enemy positions. Having thus cleared a small area, he requested and directed the landing of two transport helicopters for the evacuation of the dead and wounded. He then assisted in the mopping-up and final seizure of the battalion's objective. His gallant initiative and heroic conduct reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the U.S. Naval Service.

His action is a textbook example of leadership under extreme duress: assuming command when the leadership was lost, reorganizing troops under fire, using artillery and air assets efficiently, and ensuring evacuation of casualties.

He continued a long Marine Corps career, eventually retiring in August 1989 as a Colonel after over 27 years of service.

Beyond Service

After retiring from the United States Marine Corps in August 1989, Barnum moved into civilian roles in the Department of Defense and the Navy. He served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Reserve Affairs from 23 July 2001 to 20 January 2008. He also served as Acting Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower & Reserve Affairs) beginning 21 January 2009.



Barnum in October 2007
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Barnum has remained active in veteran organizations and public service. He has served on the Board of Directors for organizations such as the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation and the Code of Support Foundation. His legacy is also honored by the naming of the guided-missile destroyer USS Harvey C. Barnum Jr. (DDG-124) after him.

Barnum has particularly strong ties to his hometown and alma-mater: His college, Saint Anselm College (NH) honored him as a distinguished alumnus. His hometown of Cheshire, Connecticut, has recognized his contributions.

Frederick Ferguson

Flaky Fred to Fearless Fred

In August 1939, Frederick E. Ferguson was born in Pilot Point, Texas, and raised in Phoenix, Arizona. He had an older sister but no military heritage. His passion early on was aviation and his life always had that as a north star. He graduated from Phoenix Union High School in 1958. He participated in the Civil Air Patrol with such enthusiasm he earned the nickname "Flaky Fred."

United States Army Major Frederick E. Ferguson
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

With little direction in life, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served as an aviation storekeeper for four years. He did not attend college. Ferguson learned that Army helicopter pilots were in short supply in Vietnam. After four years of naval service, he was not subject to the draft so he enlisted in the U.S. Army just to fly. He attended rotary flight school and earned his Warrant Officer commission in 1967.

While serving as a helicopter pilot with the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), Ferguson performed an extraordinary rescue on January 31, 1968, during the Battle of Huế. Under intense enemy fire, he flew a UH-1 Huey through heavy anti-aircraft and small-arms fire to evacuate downed airmen trapped in hostile territory. His fearless decision and expert flying saved five comrades.

For his actions, he received the Medal of Honor from President Lyndon B. Johnson on May 1, 1969 - becoming the first U.S. Army rotary aviator in Vietnam to receive the award.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. CWO Ferguson, commander of a resupply helicopter monitoring an emergency call from wounded passengers and crewmen of a downed helicopter under heavy attack within the enemy-controlled city of Hue, unhesitatingly volunteered to attempt evacuation. Despite warnings from all aircraft to stay clear of the area due to heavy antiaircraft fire, CWO Ferguson began a low-level flight at maximum airspeed along the Perfume River toward the tiny, isolated South Vietnamese Army compound in which the crash survivors had taken refuge. Coolly and skillfully maintaining his course in the face of intense, short-range fire from enemy-occupied buildings and boats, he displayed superior flying skill and tenacity of purpose by landing his aircraft in an extremely confined area in a blinding dust cloud under heavy mortar and small-arms fire. Although the

helicopter was severely damaged by mortar fragments during the loading of the wounded, CWO Ferguson disregarded the damage and, taking off through the continuing hail of mortar fire, he flew his crippled aircraft on the return route through the rain of fire that he had experienced earlier and safely returned his wounded passengers to friendly control. CWO Ferguson's extraordinary determination saved the lives of five of his comrades. His actions are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

Ferguson continued his aviation service through 1982 and then joined the Arizona Army National Guard, where he served in command and instructor pilot roles until 1997. He retired with the rank of Major, having accumulated more than 5,000 flight hours.

After active duty, Ferguson worked in both business and public service. He had a variety of careers in sales, air ambulance flight and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (Phoenix) – Benefits Counselor and the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services – Deputy Director. He remained active in veterans' and aviation communities, mentoring young pilots and supporting veteran programs. Ferguson was inducted into the Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame (2001) and contributed oral histories to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. He can often be found wearing his full Scottish regalia, including a kilt, showing pride in his heritage.

James E. Livingston

Rural Georgia Boy, Engineering Grad, ROTC & Marine Career

James E. Livingston
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

The southeastern Georgia countryside in the 1940s was a patchwork of pine forests, sandy backroads, and resilient farming families who rose with the sun and lived by the rhythm of the land. It was in this humble setting, on January 12, 1940, in the small town of Townsend, that James Earl Livingston first entered the world. Born into a hardworking family in McIntosh County. The Livingstons were not wealthy. But young James grew up surrounded by the values that would later define his life: responsibility, faith, duty, and quiet perseverance.

During his childhood years, McIntosh County was still recovering from the long shadows of the Depression and the Second World War. The landscape of rural Georgia was rugged. James attended the local public schools, and teachers remembered him as quiet but determined.

It was during his time at McIntosh County Academy, the county's public high school, that James began to sense a calling toward military service. He saw young men in uniform returning from Korea and heard stories of sacrifice, patriotism, and the burden of command. For a young man raised to respect service, the idea of wearing the nation's cloth carried a gravity that resonated deeply.

After graduation, Livingston left his familiar Georgian surroundings and traveled to Alabama to attend Auburn University. He was admitted to the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) program, a path that allowed him to pursue an education while preparing for a future as a Marine officer.

At Auburn he earned a Bachelor of Science in Engineering - a degree reflecting both his analytical mind and his desire to build, improve, and solve problems. On June 6, 1962, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. The 1960s were a volatile era, for Livingston, Vietnam would become not only a test of leadership, but the proving ground for extraordinary courage.

Over the course of two combat tours, he developed a reputation for calm under fire, fierce loyalty to the Marines under his command, and an uncompromising commitment to mission success. But it was the events of May 2, 1968, in the hamlet of Dai Do, that would define his place in military history. As a Captain commanding Company E, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, Livingston found his

Marines in a brutal engagement against deeply entrenched North Vietnamese forces. The fighting was savage and the terrain offered almost no cover.

Captain Livingston repeatedly led assaults across open rice paddies swept by enemy fire, personally destroyed enemy positions, rallied his Marines, evacuated wounded under fire, and refused medical evacuation despite serious wounds. His leadership relieved a surrounded Marine company and turned the tide of the battle.

For these actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Richard Nixon on May 14, 1970.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Commanding Officer, Company E, in action against enemy forces. Company E launched a determined assault on the heavily fortified village of Dai Do, which had been seized by the enemy on the preceding evening isolating a marine company from the remainder of the battalion. Skillfully employing screening agents, Capt. Livingston maneuvered his men to assault positions across 500 meters of dangerous open rice paddy while under intense enemy fire. Ignoring hostile rounds impacting near him, he fearlessly led his men in a savage assault against enemy emplacements within the village. While adjusting supporting arms fire, Capt. Livingston moved to the points of heaviest resistance, shouting words of encouragement to his marines, directing their fire, and spurring the dwindling momentum of the attack on repeated occasions. Although twice painfully wounded by grenade fragments, he refused medical treatment and courageously led his men in the destruction of over 100 mutually supporting bunkers, driving the remaining enemy from their positions and relieving the pressure on the stranded marine company. As the two companies consolidated positions and evacuated casualties, a third company passed through the friendly lines launching an assault on the adjacent village of Dinh To, only to be halted by a furious counterattack of an enemy battalion. Swiftly assessing the situation and disregarding the heavy volume of enemy fire, Capt. Livingston boldly maneuvered the remaining effective men of his company forward, joined forces with the heavily engaged marines, and halted the enemy's counterattack. Wounded a third time and unable to walk, he steadfastly remained in the dangerously exposed area, deploying his men to more tenable positions and supervising the evacuation of casualties. Only when assured of the safety of his men did he allow himself to be evacuated. Capt. Livingston's gallant actions uphold the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the U.S. Naval Service.

Livingston’s career after Vietnam reflected the depth of his service and the Marine Corps’ trust in his leadership. Across 33 years of active duty, he held critical roles including Commanding General of the 22nd Marine Division, one of the Corps’ premier combat formations

Beyond Service

He retired as a Major General (two star) in 1995. He became a vocal advocate for: Improved military readiness; Leadership development; Veterans' rights; and Preserving the legacy of service. His speeches, delivered to audiences across the country, mixed humility with hard-earned wisdom. He spoke, not as a distant general, but as a Marine who had shared the mud, blood, and danger of combat with those he led.

Livingston later co-authored "Noble Warrior", a compelling account of his upbringing, service, and the harrowing fight at Dai Do. The book offered not only historical perspective but also personal reflection - a window into the character of a man shaped by family, faith, and the Marine ethos.

Through all the deployments, command responsibilities, and public engagements, Livingston's anchor was his family. He and his wife, Sally, raised two daughters, providing stability despite the demands of military life. To his daughters, he was not a general but a father; to his Marines, he was not a distant figure but a mentor.

Robert F. Foley

HS Basketball Star to West Point and Lt. General Rank

Lt. Gen. Robert F. Foley
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Robert Franklin Foley was born on May 30, 1941, in Newton, Massachusetts. Growing up in Belmont, he demonstrated early qualities of leadership, discipline, and a strong sense of duty. At Belmont High School, from which he graduated in 1959, Foley became widely known for his athletic skill, particularly in basketball. Standing 6' 7" tall and commanding on the court, he received 15 college scholarship offers.

Yet, even as a young man, Foley felt called to something greater than athletics alone - a calling toward service, honor, and country. His desire to serve led him to accept an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

At the Academy, Foley embodied the ideals of the Corps of Cadets and distinguished himself through both his academic performance and his leadership potential. Both embodied in being captain of the basketball team. He graduated in 1963, commissioning as an infantry officer, prepared to lead soldiers and serve the nation during one of the most turbulent eras in American military history.

As America's involvement in Southeast Asia deepened, Foley deployed to Vietnam as the commander of Company A, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division.

On November 5, 1966, Captain Foley and his company engaged a well-fortified enemy force near Quan Dau Tieng. Facing intense fire, Foley repeatedly exposed himself to danger - rallying his soldiers forward, rescuing wounded men, and personally neutralizing enemy positions. His leadership under extreme pressure, his refusal to retreat, and his unwavering commitment to his soldiers distinguished him as one of the most courageous leaders of the war. For these extraordinary actions, he received the Medal of Honor.

He was presented the medal by President Lyndon Johnson on May 1, 1968.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Foley's company was ordered to extricate another company of the battalion. Moving through the dense jungle to aid the besieged unit, Company A encountered a strong enemy force occupying well-concealed,

defensive positions, and the company's leading element quickly sustained several casualties. Capt. Foley immediately ran forward to the scene of the most intense action to direct the company's efforts. Deploying one platoon on the flank, he led the other two platoons in an attack on the enemy in the face of intense fire. During this action both radio operators accompanying him were wounded. At grave risk to himself, he defied the enemy's murderous fire and helped the wounded operators to a position where they could receive medical care. As he moved forward again one of his machine-gun crews was wounded. Seizing the weapon, he charged forward, firing the machine gun, shouting orders, and rallying his men, thus maintaining the momentum of the attack. Under increasingly heavy enemy fire he ordered his assistant to take cover and, alone, Capt. Foley continued to advance firing the machine gun until the wounded had been evacuated and the attack in this area could be resumed. When movement on the other flank was halted by the enemy's fanatical defense, Capt. Foley moved to personally direct this critical phase of the battle. Leading the renewed effort, he was blown off his feet and wounded by an enemy grenade. Despite his painful wounds he refused medical aid and persevered in the forefront of the attack on the enemy redoubt. He led the assault on several enemy gun emplacements and, singlehandedly, destroyed three such positions. His outstanding personal leadership under intense enemy fire during the fierce battle which lasted for several hours inspired his men to heroic efforts and was instrumental in the ultimate success of the operation. Capt. Foley's magnificent courage, selfless concern for his men, and professional skill reflect the utmost credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

His service lasted 37 years, rising to the three-star rank of Lt. General. During service he obtained an MBA from Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1972.

Following his military service in 2000, Foley continued his lifelong commitment to developing soldiers and strengthening military families. He served as President of Marion Military Institute and later became the Director of Army Emergency Relief, where he oversaw programs supporting soldiers and their loved ones. His legacy is further honored through the Lt. Gen. Robert F. Foley Scholarship of Honor at West Point, awarded to cadets who demonstrate exceptional perseverance. A Lieutenant General is a three-star rank.

Lt. Gen. Foley is married, has three children, and is the proud grandfather of several grandchildren. Throughout his life, he has been recognized not only for his courage in combat but for his devotion to service, mentorship, and the values of duty, honor, and country.

Melvin M. Morris

Oklahoma Pathway Out to Army Special Forces

Melvin Morris was born in Okmulgee, Oklahoma on January 7, 1942. His father was John Morris, who worked as a handyman when work was available, and his mother was a homemaker. He grew up in a large family of three brothers and four sisters. When young he enjoyed activities like fishing and hunting. His family included military-service role models: two older brothers and an uncle who served in the all-Black 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion during World War II.

U.S. Marine Col. Jay Vargas (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Oklahoma had limited career opportunities for Melvin, so joining the military became one viable path. Morris entered the military beginning with the Oklahoma Army National Guard in 1959. He soon transferred to active duty in the U.S. Army. After enlisting, he earned his GED. In 1961 he began training for Special Forces and by September 1963 he had qualified as a Green Beret. He served with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) and commanded a Strike Force drawn from Company D during Vietnam.

Morris (left) with a comrade in Vietnam *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

On 17 September 1969, his unit operating near Chi Lang, Republic of Vietnam encountered heavy enemy action. Under intense fire, he led an advance to recover the body of a fallen team commander and then returned to recover a map case with classified information - while wounded three times. For that action, he was originally awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) in April 1970.

After a mandated review of awards, his DSC was upgraded and he received the Medal of Honor on March 18, 2014, from President Barack Obama.

President Barack H. Obama, background, presents a Medal of Honor to former U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

His citation reads:

> Staff Sergeant Melvin Morris distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Commander of a Strike Force drawn from Company D, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, during combat operations against an armed enemy in the vicinity of Chi Lang, Republic of Vietnam on September 17, 1969. On that afternoon, Staff Sergeant Morris' affiliated companies encountered an extensive enemy mine field and were subsequently engaged by a hostile force. Staff Sergeant Morris learned by radio that a fellow team commander had been killed near an enemy bunker and he immediately reorganized his men into an effective assault posture before advancing forward and splitting off with two men to recover the team commander's body. Observing the maneuver, the hostile force concentrated its fire on Staff Sergeant Morris' three-man element and successfully wounded both men accompanying him. After assisting the two wounded men back to his forces' lines, Staff Sergeant Morris charged forward into withering enemy fire with only his men's suppressive fire as cover. While enemy machine gun emplacements

> continuously directed strafing fusillades against him, Staff Sergeant Morris destroyed the positions with hand grenades and continued his assault, ultimately eliminating four bunkers. Upon reaching the bunker nearest the fallen team commander, Staff Sergeant Morris repulsed the enemy, retrieved his comrade and began the arduous trek back to friendly lines. He was wounded three times as he struggled forward, but ultimately succeeded in returning his fallen comrade to a friendly position. Staff Sergeant Morris' extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

He retired from the Army in May 1985 with the rank of Sergeant First Class. After retiring, Morris and his family settled in Brevard County, Florida in December 1990.

He has been active in veteran-commemoration and educational activities, including writing and public speaking about military history and valor. For example, he contributed to the magazine of the American Battlefield Trust and participated in battlefield heritage projects. He has been a guest of honor at Medal of Honor events (for instance in his home state of Oklahoma). He has spoken about his experiences with post-traumatic stress, transition to civilian life, and the importance of remembering fellow soldiers.

Walter J. Marm, Jr.

PA Eagle Scout and NC Farmer

Walter J. Marm, Jr. (Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Morris (left) with a comrade in VietnamOn November 20, 1941, in the quiet mill town of Washington, Pennsylvania, Walter Joseph Marm Jr. entered the world as the eldest of three children born to Walter and Dorothy Marm. His father, a Pennsylvania State Police officer, and his mother, a hardworking retail clerk, raised their family in a home where duty, faith, and personal responsibility were not merely spoken values - they were daily expectations. From a young age, "Joe," as he was known, revealed an early sense of discipline and purpose. He excelled in scouting, eventually earning the rank of Eagle Scout, a distinction that foreshadowed the moral courage and perseverance that would later define his life.

Growing up in southwestern Pennsylvania, Marm developed a deep appreciation for the outdoors, community, and the values instilled by the Catholic faith. Though accounts of his early education differ, what is clear is that Marm distinguished himself in the classroom and on the rifle range, forming the foundation of a calm, steady demeanor and a natural ability to focus under pressure - traits that would later save lives on the battlefields of Vietnam.

After graduating from high school, Marm continued his education at Duquesne University, a Catholic institution, in Pittsburgh. There, he earned a degree in business administration in 1964, but the world beyond academia was rapidly changing. The war in Southeast Asia was escalating. Rather than wait for the draft, Marm chose his own path, enlisting in the U.S. Army and pursuing a commission through Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. He soon earned the gold bars of a second lieutenant, followed by the coveted tabs of a Ranger.

By 1965, Marm had been assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), a unit destined to fight in one of the most pivotal battles of the Vietnam War: the Battle of Ia Drang. At twenty-four years old, he led a platoon of young soldiers who looked to him not only for orders but for confidence amid the uncertainty of combat.

That confidence was tested on November 14, 1965, in the tangled elephant grass and red earth of the Ia Drang Valley. When his platoon became pinned down by enemy fire from a well-concealed machine-gun bunker, Marm recognized that hesitation meant death. With complete disregard for his own safety, he maneuvered forward alone, drawing fire to pinpoint the enemy position. Though wounded by gunfire during the approach, he pressed on. Crawling, then charging upright through

the open killing zone, he hurled a grenade into the bunker and followed it with a direct assault, killing the remaining defenders in close combat. His actions broke the enemy stronghold and saved his platoon from destruction.

For this extraordinary act of conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity Walter Joseph Marm Jr. received the Medal of Honor from President Lyndon B. Johnson on December 19, 1966.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. As a platoon leader in the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), 1st Lt. Marm demonstrated indomitable courage during a combat operation. His company was moving through the valley to relieve a friendly unit surrounded by an enemy force of estimated regimental size. 1st Lt. Marm led his platoon through withering fire until they were finally forced to take cover. Realizing that his platoon could not hold very long, and seeing four enemy soldiers moving into his position, he moved quickly under heavy fire and annihilated all four. Then, seeing that his platoon was receiving intense fire from a concealed machine gun, he deliberately exposed himself to draw its fire. Thus, locating its position, he attempted to destroy it with an antitank weapon. Although he inflicted casualties, the weapon did not silence the enemy fire. Quickly, disregarding the intense fire directed on him and his platoon, he charged 30 meters across open ground and hurled grenades into the enemy position, killing some of the eight insurgents manning it. Although severely wounded, when his grenades were expended, armed with only a rifle, he continued the momentum of his assault on the position and killed the remainder of the enemy. 1st Lt. Marm's selfless actions reduced the fire on his platoon, broke the enemy assault, and rallied his unit to continue toward the accomplishment of this mission. 1st Lt. Marm's gallantry on the battlefield and his extraordinary intrepidity at the risk of his life are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Marm continued to serve with humility and steadfast dedication for nearly three decades. Over the course of his career, he rose to the rank of Colonel, holding command and staff positions both in the United States and abroad. Despite the notoriety of his Medal of Honor, Marm remained a quiet professional - one who believed the medal belonged as much to the men of his platoon as it did to him. His leadership style embodied a simple philosophy: take care of your soldiers, do what is right, and never ask others to do what you would not do yourself.

Beyond Service

After retiring from the Army in 1995, Marm and his family settled in North Carolina, where he embraced a quieter life away from the military spotlight. He became involved in community

service, veterans' advocacy, church activities, and speaking engagements where he shared lessons on leadership, sacrifice, and faith. At one point, he even took up raising pigs - a testament to his desire for a grounded, hardworking lifestyle after a career defined by conflict and duty.

Yet even in retirement, Marm remained a soldier at heart. He regularly appeared at military commemorations, school events, civic organizations, and Medal of Honor gatherings, lending his voice to the next generation and reminding Americans of the cost of freedom. Humble and soft-spoken, he carried his medal not as a symbol of heroism, but as a reminder of the men who did not come home from Ia Drang.

Ronald E. Ray

Georgia HS Drop Out to White House Fellow

Ronald E. Ray (Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Ronald Eric Ray entered the world on December 7, 1941, as the attack on Pearl Harbor unfolded drawing the United States into WWII. In a small town of Cordele, Georgia, Ronald Ray was born into a family of five brothers, Ray grew up in the rural South, a landscape of hard work and close-knit values.

Few written records capture the details of his earliest years, but the available fragments sketch the outline of a determined young man who grew up faster than most. Ray left high school in 1959, choosing instead to pursue a direction that promised challenge and purpose. At eighteen, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. The decision would shape the rest of his life.

Ray's early military experience coincided with a period of global tension and rapid modernization within the U.S. armed forces. After completing his initial enlistment, he gravitated toward roles that demanded exceptional physical fitness, mental resilience, and leadership under pressure. He attended Special Forces training and, recognizing his aptitude, the Army sent him to Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning in 1964. There, Ray began the transition from enlisted soldier to commissioned officer, a shift that required equal parts competence and character.

By the mid-1960s, the conflict in Vietnam had escalated, Ray was assigned as a platoon leader with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, part of the storied 25t h Infantry Division. It was with this unit that he would face the crucible that defined him.

On June 19, 1966, deep in the Ia Drang Valley, Ray's platoon came under intense enemy fire. The terrain was thick, visibility low, and the enemy forces determined. What unfolded during the next hours would be studied by soldiers for generations. Ray repeatedly exposed himself to overwhelming fire to rescue wounded men, reorganize his platoon's defenses, and direct return fire. His calm leadership and absolute refusal to abandon his soldiers helped turn chaos into survival. At one point, he used his own body as a shield for a wounded comrade; at another, he braved open ground to retrieve a machine gun essential to the platoon's defense. His courage, sustained through one of the fiercest firefights of the campaign, would later earn him the Medal of Honor.

President Richard Nixon awarded Ray the nation's highest military decoration on May 14, 1970.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Ray distinguished himself while serving as a platoon leader with Company A. When one of his ambush patrols was attacked by an estimated reinforced Viet Cong company, Capt. Ray organized a reaction force and quickly moved through two kilometers of mountainous jungle terrain to the contact area. After breaking through the hostile lines to reach the beleaguered patrol, Capt. Ray began directing the reinforcement of the site. When an enemy position pinned down three of his men with a heavy volume of automatic-weapons fire, he silenced the emplacement with a grenade and killed four Viet Cong with his rifle fire. As medics were moving a casualty toward a sheltered position, they began receiving intense hostile fire. While directing suppressive fire on the enemy position, Capt. Ray moved close enough to silence the enemy with a grenade. A few moments later Capt. Ray saw an enemy grenade land, unnoticed, near two of his men. Without hesitation or regard for his safety he dove between the grenade and the men, thus shielding them from the explosion while receiving wounds in his exposed feet and legs. He immediately sustained additional wounds in his legs from an enemy machine gun, but nevertheless he silenced the emplacement with another grenade. Although suffering great pain from his wounds, Capt. Ray continued to direct his men, providing the outstanding courage and leadership they vitally needed, and prevented their annihilation by successfully leading them from their surrounded position. Only after assuring that his platoon was no longer in immediate danger did he allow himself to be evacuated for medical treatment. By his gallantry at the risk of his life in the highest traditions of the military service, Capt. Ray has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Yet Ray treated the medal not as a personal triumph but as a testament to the men who fought beside him. He often emphasized that heroism rarely comes from a single moment of glory - it comes from the steady conviction that no man should be left behind.

Ray continued to serve in the Army until 1980, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His career included assignments around the world, from advising European allies to commanding the 1st Battalion of the 7th Special Forces Group.

But even as his military résumé expanded, Ray never stopped learning. He earned a bachelor’s degree in history from the University of Tampa, and later, a master’s in public administration from the University of Oklahoma.

Beyond Service

When medical reasons forced his retirement from active duty, Lt. Colonel Ronald Ray simply shifted his focus. He entered the world of business, founding a real estate development and brokerage company in Florida.

His reputation for integrity and strategic thinking quickly carried him into public service roles far beyond the private sector. He became a White House Fellow, serving as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Commerce. Later, President George H. W. Bush appointed him Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs. In that role, Ray championed veteran services, pushing for more efficient systems, stronger advocacy and better support for those transitioning from military life.

He also devoted significant energy to organizations dedicated to valor and legacy. His leadership as President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society reflected not only his own experience but also his commitment to preserving the stories of those whose sacrifices might otherwise fade from memory. Ray's story is one of steadfast duty. He stood when others fell, led when others faltered.

Robert E. O’Malley

Marine Corporal First to Receive MOH in Vietnam

Sergeant Robert E. O'Malley, USMC
(Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Robert Emmet O’Malley was born on June 3, 1943, in Queens County, New York. Like many, his early years were shaped far more by the neighborhood than by formal public record. What exists in his official biography is sparse - no long written accounts of his childhood, no magazine interviews about his early influences, no documentary passages cataloging his family lineage.

In 1961, before Vietnam became a household word, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. After completing training, he was assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment of the 3rd Marine Division. By the summer of 1965, the United States had begun to escalate its involvement in Vietnam, and O’Malley, now a Corporal, deployed with his unit as American forces expanded their footprint in the region.

In August 1965, his battalion took part in Operation Starlite, the first major offensive action conducted solely by the U.S. Marines in Vietnam. What unfolded during that operation would etch Robert O’Malley’s name into Marine Corps history.

On August 18, 1965, O’Malley led his squad against a well-entrenched Viet Cong force. Under intense enemy fire, he personally spearheaded three separate assaults on enemy positions, each time exposing himself to direct danger in order to push his Marines forward. Wounded during the action, he refused evacuation. Instead, he continued to move across the battlefield, pulling wounded Marines to safety while under fire and organizing the defense of his position. Acts of courage are not uncommon in war, but the consistency and clarity of purpose with which O’Malley fought that day set him apart. He was, by every account, a Marine wholly committed to his men.

For his actions, Robert E. O’Malley became the first U.S. Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism in Vietnam. The medal was presented to him by President Lyndon B. Johnson on December 6, 1966.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the communist (Viet Cong) forces at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. While leading his squad in the assault against a strongly entrenched enemy force, his unit came

under intense small-arms fire. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Sgt. O'Malley raced across an open rice paddy to a trench line where the enemy forces were located. Jumping into the trench, he attacked the Viet Cong with his rifle and grenades, singlehandedly killed eight of the enemy. He then led his squad to the assistance of an adjacent marine unit which was suffering heavy casualties. Continuing to press forward, he reloaded his weapon and fired with telling effect into the enemy emplacement. He personally assisted in the evacuation of several wounded marines, and again regrouping the remnants of his squad, he returned to the point of the heaviest fighting. Ordered to an evacuation point by an officer, Sgt. O'Malley gathered his besieged and badly wounded squad, and boldly led them under fire to a helicopter for withdrawal. Although three times wounded in this encounter, and facing imminent death from a fanatic and determined enemy, he steadfastly refused evacuation and continued to cover his squad's boarding of the helicopters while, from an exposed position, he delivered fire against the enemy until his wounded men were evacuated. Only then, with his last mission accomplished, did he permit himself to be removed from the battlefield. By his valor, leadership, and courageous efforts in behalf of his comrades, he served as an inspiration to all who observed him and reflected the highest credit upon the Marine Corps and the U.S. Naval Service.

Beyond Service

O'Malley in 2010 (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

His wounds and the lingering effects of his service resulted in his medical retirement from the Marine Corps in 1966, at the rank of Corporal. Though young in years, he had experienced the extremes of war and carried the physical and emotional burdens that accompany such service. In the years that followed, O'Malley remained connected to the Marine Corps community, attending events, ceremonies, and Medal of Honor gatherings. His public life was modest; he did not seek publicity or personal recognition. Instead, he lived quietly, as many combat veterans do, carrying with him the memory of the men with whom he served and the responsibilities of a Medal of Honor recipient.

James P. Fleming

Inspired by his Father

James P. Fleming (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

John P Fleming was born in Sedalia, Missouri, on March 12, 1943, to John H. and Dixie L. Fleming, James Phillip Fleming was their oldest child. The couple's second child, Douglas L. Fleming, was born two years later. He was influenced by his father's air action in WWII over Iwo Jima. As military author Debroah Maulding writes in a Beyond Belief chapter: "John Fleming was a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force and had flown in the Pacific theater of World War II, and with the Strategic Air Command during the Cold War. As a career pilot, Lt. Col. Fleming served with distinction, earning an Air Medal for his service at Iwo Jima where he flew one of the C-47 aircraft down the beach, dropping gun barrels and blood plasma to the Marines. "Yes, young James was impressed, but did not learn about the Iwo Jima efforts of his father until his own Medal of Honor ceremony.

Maulding further explains: "After the family moved to Washington in 1960, James attended Moses Lake High School graduating in 1961. Moses Lake High School is one of only two high schools in the United States having the distinction of boasting two Medal of Honor recipients, James Phillip Fleming and Joe "Ronnie" Hooper. Realizing that there have been just over 3500 Medal of Honor recipients since the inception of the award, it is surprising when a university or college has more than one award recipient, but even more so when a high school holds that distinction.

In 1964, James married Jennifer Hansen, of Kelso, Washington. While attending Washington State University, James was active in Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) which led to a commission as 2nd Lieutenant upon graduation in June 1965. Once again, James was one of two Washington State University alumni to earn a Medal of Honor, James Fleming and Ronald "Ronnie" Shurer. What are the odds?"

James entered the Air Force in 1966 in Pullman, Washington, as a 2nd Lieutenant and was offered the opportunity to be a pilot or an intelligence officer. Without hesitation, he chose to be a pilot. He completed flight training in May 1967, earning his wings. Fleming's first assigned duty station was Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, flying helicopter missions in support of the remote missile facilities housed around that base.

By 1968, Fleming was assigned as a UH-1F helicopter pilot to the 20th Special Operations Squadron - men known as the "Green Hornets." By the spring of 1969, he had flown more than 800 combat sorties, each one a testament to courage under pressure.

But it was the mission of November 26, 1968, that would etch his name permanently into the annals of American valor. That morning, a six-man Special Forces reconnaissance team found itself pinned down by a large enemy force near Đức Cơ. Surrounded, low on ammunition, and moments from being overrun, their only hope lay in the sky. Fleming and a handful of other Green Hornet pilots answered the call.

The first rescue attempts failed under fierce enemy fire. One helicopter was forced to crash land; another withdrew with damage. Fleming circled the area, assessing the impossible. A narrow clearing offered the only landing spot, but it was exposed, swept by enemy fire, and nearly suicidal. Yet the trapped soldiers had no time left.

He brought his UH-1F down into the clearing, hovering precariously above the muddy terrain. Enemy rounds tore through the air and struck his aircraft. The helicopter shuddered, alarms blared, and his crew shouted warnings - but Fleming held steady. The Special Forces team sprinted through the clearing, diving into the helicopter as bullets stitched the ground around them. With the last man aboard, Fleming lifted off, flying the damaged aircraft away from the kill zone and delivering the men safely back to base.

The extraordinary precision and bravery he displayed that day earned him the Medal of Honor, presented by President Richard Nixon on May 14, 1970.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Fleming (then 1st Lt.) distinguished himself as the aircraft commander of a UH-1F transport helicopter. Capt. Fleming went to the aid of a six-man Special Forces long-range reconnaissance patrol that was in danger of being overrun by a large, heavily armed hostile force. Despite the knowledge that one helicopter had been downed by intense hostile fire, Capt. Fleming descended, and balanced his helicopter on a river bank with the tail boom hanging over open water. The patrol could not penetrate to the landing site and he was forced to withdraw. Dangerously low on fuel, Capt. Fleming repeated his original landing maneuver. Disregarding his own safety, he remained in this exposed position. Hostile fire crashed through his windscreen as the patrol boarded his helicopter. Capt. Fleming made a successful takeoff through a barrage of hostile fire and recovered safely at a forward base. Capt. Fleming's profound concern for his fellow men, at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Yet what defined Fleming was not the medal, but his humility. He spoke rarely of that day, and when he did, he credited his crew, the Special Forces team, and the training that bound them together. His career continued for nearly three decades. After Vietnam, he transitioned to fixed-

wing aircraft, flew C-141 Starlifters across the globe, and later served at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He became an influential mentor, shaping new generations of officers. In his final assignment, he directed the ROTC program at Texas Christian University, instilling in young cadets the same quiet integrity that had guided him.

Beyond Service

Fleming retired as a Colonel in 1996 and eventually returned to Washington state, where he remained active in veteran outreach and Medal of Honor commemorative events. He raised a family with his wife - three children, including a son who would serve during the war in Afghanistan - continuing the family legacy of duty and service.

Thomas R. Norris

Bad Eyes for Flying, But Ok for the SEALS and FBI

Thomas Rolland Norris entered the world on January 14, 1944, in Jacksonville, Florida, at a time when the United States was still locked in the final years of global conflict. His father, Rolland Norris, served in the U.S. Navy, and the demands of military life shaped much of Tommy's early childhood. With his mother Irene and his brothers James and Kenneth, the Norris family moved frequently - from Michigan to Wisconsin and eventually to the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

Growing up, Norris demonstrated a quiet determination rather than a need for attention. He joined the Boy Scouts, where he worked steadily and without bravado until he earned the rank of Eagle Scout. By the early 1960s, he was walking the halls of Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, an unassuming student who excelled academically and athletically. He graduated in 1963.

That fall he enrolled at the University of Maryland, majoring in sociology with a focus on criminology. His aspirations at the time leaned toward federal law enforcement - perhaps even a career with the FBI. On the wrestling mats of the ACC, Norris distinguished himself further, earning conference championships in 1965 and 1966. Yet even with his athletic success, Norris remained grounded.

After receiving his degree in 1967, Norris faced a turning point. His student deferment ended, and with the Vietnam War escalating, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He hoped to fly, but fate had other plans. Disqualified for pilot training due to eyesight and depth-perception issues, Norris volunteered for the Navy's elite special operations force - the SEALs. What began as a setback became destiny. In July 1969, he graduated from BUD/S Class 45 at Little Creek, joining a brotherhood known for its impossible missions and unyielding standards.

Norris served with SEAL Team Two and was eventually attached to a unit supporting Military Assistance Command Vietnam- Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), the clandestine organization conducting dangerous operations across Southeast Asia. It was here, in April 1972, that Thomas Norris would perform one of the most daring rescues of the Vietnam War.

When two American aviators were shot down deep inside North Vietnamese-controlled territory during the Easter Offensive, the situation was considered hopeless. Enemy forces controlled the region, and previous rescue attempts had failed. Norris volunteered anyway. Over several days, he crawled, hid, and maneuvered through enemy-held jungle, often disguised as a fisherman alongside a single South Vietnamese commando. He found the first pilot and carried him out at daybreak under heavy threat. The second rescue required even more nerve - Norris journeyed at night by sampan, blending with the local population, and returned with the downed airman before dawn. This effort was to save a 53-year-old airman, call sign Bat 21 Bravo, who had avoided capture for twelve days, with a broken write and loss of 45 lbs.

His stalwart South Vietnamese frogman, Petty Officer Nguyen Van Kiet, was awarded the US Navy Cross in 1976, one of only two foreign allies to receive the highest award that can be presented to a foreign ally. The 1988 movie "Bat 21" with Gene Hackman and Danny Glover did not focus on Norris at all as his actions remained classified.

Lieutenant Norris and Petty Officer Third Class Nguyen Van Kiet went behind enemy lines disguised as fishermen in a sampan to rescue Lieutenant Colonel Iceal Hambleton. Norris was awarded the Medal of Honor and Nguyen was recognized with the Navy Cross for their actions.
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

It was an act of courage so profound that President Gerald Ford would present him the Medal of Honor in 1976.

His citation reads:

> Lt. Norris completed an unprecedented ground rescue of two downed pilots deep within heavily controlled enemy territory in Quang Tri Province. Lt. Norris, on the night of 10 April, led a five-man patrol through 2,000 meters of heavily controlled territory, located one of the downed pilots at daybreak, and returned to the Forward Operating Base (FOB). On 11 April, after a devastating mortar and rocket attack on the small FOB, Lt. Norris led a three-man team on two unsuccessful rescue attempts for the second pilot. On the afternoon of the 12th, a forward air controller located the pilot and notified Lt. Norris. Dressed in fishermen disguises and using a sampan, Lt. Norris and one Vietnamese traveled throughout the night and found the injured pilot at dawn. Covering the pilot with bamboo and vegetation, they

began the return journey, successfully evading a North Vietnamese patrol. Approaching the FOB, they came under heavy machine-gun fire. Lt. Norris called in an air strike which provided suppression fire and a smoke screen, allowing the rescue party to reach the FOB. By his outstanding display of decisive leadership, undaunted courage, and selfless dedication in the face of extreme danger, Lt. Norris enhanced the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval service.

But war was not yet done with him. Six months later, in October 1972, Norris was leading another reconnaissance mission when a gunshot struck him in the head. His injuries were nearly fatal. He lost an eye and part of his skull, and the surgeries that followed lasted years. In May 1975, medically retired, Norris might have faded into quiet anonymity. Instead, he did something only Thomas R. Norris would attempt: he pursued a dream that seemed as impossible as his wartime rescues.

Post Service

Despite his disability, Norris applied to join the FBI. Not only was he accepted, he later became one of the founding members of the Bureau's Hostage Rescue Team - its most elite unit. For two decades he served as an operator and agent, carrying out dangerous assignments with the same humility he had shown in Vietnam.

Medal of Honor recipient Thomas Norris, USN (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

In every chapter of his life, Norris demonstrated the rare blend of courage, patience, and quiet professionalism that defined him. He never boasted, never demanded attention, and never used his Medal of Honor to open doors. He preferred anonymity, choosing instead to let his actions, whether on a battlefield or in an FBI operation, speak for him. And in doing so, Thomas R. Norris became a symbol - not merely of valor, but of the steady, resolute strength that defines the very best of American service.

Harold A. Fritz

Saved by a Zippo Lighter

Harold A. Fritz
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Harold Arthur “Hal” Fritz, born on February 21, 1944, in Chicago, Illinois. Raised in the Midwest, Fritz grew up during a period shaped by the experiences of World War II and the Korean War, surrounded by an ethos of service and responsibility. Though few public sources provide extensive detail about his early family life or schooling, the themes that would later define his career - leadership, courage, and selfless service - were already present.

Fritz pursued higher education at the University of Tampa, where he studied elementary education. He had originally set his sights on a career in veterinary medicine and was committed to a civilian professional life before the call to military service altered his path. In 1966, he entered the U.S. Army from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, beginning a career that would span nearly three decades and place him among the rare Americans awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry.

After completing Officer Candidate School, Fritz was assigned to the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment and later deployed to Vietnam as a platoon leader with A Troop, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. As a married man he was off to war.

On January 11, 1969, then–First Lieutenant Fritz was leading a seven-vehicle armored column along Highway 13 near Quan Loi in Binh Long Province. The column was ambushed by a substantially larger North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force that unleashed heavy weapons fire at close range. The initial moments of the ambush inflicted severe casualties and disabled several vehicles, including Fritz’s own armored personnel carrier. Despite suffering serious wounds, he immediately climbed atop his burning vehicle to direct the defense, moving under heavy fire to reposition his men and coordinate a counterattack.

While directing his troops, Fritz was hit in the chest by an enemy round fired from only a few meters away. Under normal circumstances, the shot to the chest would have been fatal. However, the bullet struck a metal Zippo lighter he carried in his breast pocket. The lighter was a gift from his wife that he always carried. It now symbolizes the randomness of survival in combat.

For his actions that day, Harold A. Fritz was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Richard Nixon in a ceremony at the White House on March 2, 1971.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. (then 1st Lt.) Fritz, Armor, U.S. Army, distinguished himself while serving as a platoon leader with Troop A, near Quan Loi. Capt. Fritz was leading his seven-vehicle armored column along Highway 13 to meet and escort a truck convoy when the column suddenly came under intense crossfire from a reinforced enemy company deployed in ambush positions. In the initial attack, Capt. Fritz' vehicle was hit and he was seriously wounded. Realizing that his platoon was completely surrounded, vastly outnumbered, and in danger of being overrun, Capt. Fritz leaped to the top of his burning vehicle and directed the positioning of his remaining vehicles and men. With complete disregard for his wounds and safety, he ran from vehicle to vehicle in complete view of the enemy gunners in order to reposition his men, to improve the defenses, to assist the wounded, to distribute ammunition, to direct fire, and to provide encouragement to his men. When a strong enemy force assaulted the position and attempted to overrun the platoon, Capt. Fritz manned a machine gun and through his exemplary action inspired his men to deliver intense and deadly fire which broke the assault and routed the attackers. Moments later a second enemy force advanced to within two meters of the position and threatened to overwhelm the defenders. Capt. Fritz, armed only with a pistol and bayonet, led a small group of his men in a fierce and daring charge which routed the attackers and inflicted heavy casualties. When a relief force arrived, Capt. Fritz saw that it was not deploying effectively against the enemy positions, and he moved through the heavy enemy fire to direct its deployment against the hostile positions. This deployment forced the enemy to abandon the ambush site and withdraw. Despite his wounds, Capt. Fritz returned to his position, assisted his men, and refused medical attention until all of his wounded comrades had been treated and evacuated. The extraordinary courage and selflessness displayed by Capt. Fritz, at the repeated risk of his own life above and beyond the call of duty, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect greatest credit upon himself, his unit, and the Armed Forces.

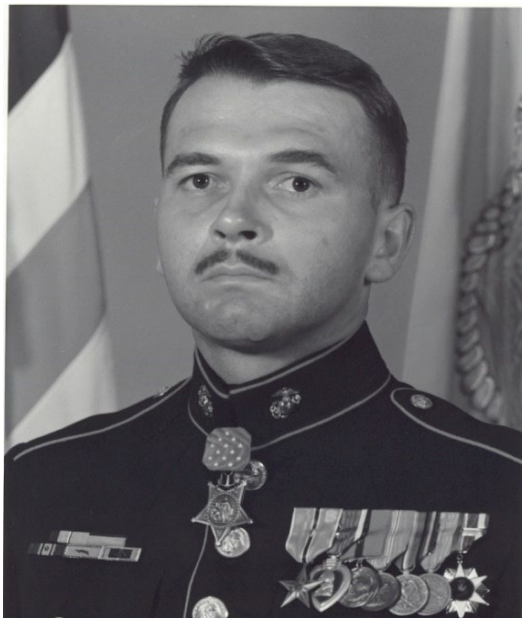
Following his combat service, Fritz continued his Army career, serving in a variety of command and staff roles as he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Over 27 years of service, he earned numerous decorations in addition to the Medal of Honor, including the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, multiple Bronze Stars with “V” device for valor, and two Purple Hearts. His military career was marked by professionalism, mentorship, and a dedication to the welfare of soldiers under his command.

Beyond Service

After retiring from the Army in 1993, Fritz settled in Peoria, Illinois, where he continued a life of service in the veteran community. He worked at the Department of Veterans Affairs Bob Michel Outpatient Clinic, serving fellow veterans and advocating for their care and well-being. His post-service career also included extensive involvement with the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, educational outreach, public speaking on leadership and citizenship, and contributions to organizations dedicated to military history and veteran support. Though many details of his private family life remain just that - private.

Allan J. Kellogg Jr.

High School Dropout with Courage to Mud Puddle a Grenade



Allen J. Kellogg, Jr., USMC, Medal of Honor recipient
(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Allan Jay Kellogg Jr. was born on October 1, 1943, in Bethel, Connecticut. He was the son of Allan Jay Kellogg Sr. and Sarah Elizabeth Blaney, and grew up in a working-class New England family alongside three siblings. His early life in Bethel was marked by modest roots and the ordinary rhythms of small-town Connecticut, but even in childhood he displayed a seriousness and discipline that would later define his military career. He attended Bethel High School for two years before deciding to leave school in 1959 to enlist.

On November 14, 1960, at age seventeen, Kellogg enlisted in the United States Marine Corps from Bridgeport, Connecticut. He completed recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, followed by individual combat training at Camp Lejeune. The Marine Corps quickly became both a vocation and a calling. During his early years he served as a rifleman, assistant automatic rifleman, and fire team leader with the 2nd Marine Division.

By the time Kellogg deployed to Vietnam in March 1966, he was already a seasoned noncommissioned officer. Serving with the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, he rotated between combat and supply roles, illustrating the versatility expected of Marine leaders in the unpredictable conditions of the Vietnam War. Promoted to staff sergeant in 1967, he returned to Vietnam for a second combat tour in late 1969. It was here, serving as platoon sergeant of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, that he performed the act of valor for which he is remembered.

On the night of March 11, 1970, in Quang Nam Province, Kellogg and his Marines were evacuating a fallen comrade under heavy enemy fire when an enemy soldier threw a grenade into their midst. The device struck Kellogg in the chest before landing near his men. Without hesitation, he shoved the grenade into the mud and threw his body over it, absorbing the blast. Though severely wounded, his quick action saved the lives of those around him.

This extraordinary sacrifice was recognized on October 15, 1973, when President Richard Nixon presented him with the Medal of Honor.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a platoon sergeant with Company G, in connection with combat operations against the enemy on the night of 11 March 1970. Under the leadership of G/Sgt. Kellogg, a small unit from Company G was evacuating a fallen comrade when the unit came under a heavy volume of small-arms and automatic-weapons fire from a numerically superior enemy force occupying well-concealed emplacements in the surrounding jungle. During the ensuing fierce engagement, an enemy soldier managed to maneuver through the dense foliage to a position near the marines, and hurled a hand grenade into their midst which glanced off the chest of GSgt. Kellogg. Quick to act, he forced the grenade into the mud in which he was standing, threw himself over the lethal weapon and absorbed the full effects of its detonation with his body, thereby preventing serious injury or possible death to several of his fellow marines. Although suffering multiple injuries to his chest and his right shoulder and arm, G/Sgt. Kellogg resolutely continued to direct the efforts of his men until all were able to maneuver to the relative safety of the company perimeter. By his heroic and decisive action in risking his life to save the lives of his comrades, G/Sgt. Kellogg reflected the highest credit upon himself and upheld the finest traditions of the Marine Corps and the U.S. Naval Service.

Kellogg spent months recovering from his injuries at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Yokosuka, Japan, before returning to duty in December 1970. Undeterred by his wounds, he continued to serve with distinction. He became an instructor at the Field Medical Service School at Camp Pendleton, where he guided Navy corpsmen preparing for deployment. Promoted to gunnery sergeant in 1972 and later to first sergeant and sergeant major, he continued a full and active Marine Corps career.

Beyond Service

In 1969, Kellogg married Carol Diane Maroldi in Bethel, Connecticut. The couple raised a son, Aaron, who would later become a decorated U.S. Army paratrooper with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, continuing the family's tradition of military service. After retiring from the Marine Corps in October 1990, Kellogg settled permanently in Hawaii. He found continued purpose in serving fellow veterans, working as a benefits counselor for the Department of Veterans Affairs at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu. Known for his humility despite his heroism, he remained involved in veterans' organizations, outreach programs, and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's educational initiatives. His interviews, oral histories, and public appearances consistently emphasized service, sacrifice, and the responsibility of leadership. Allan J. Kellogg Jr. stands as one of the most respected Marine noncommissioned officers of his generation - an individual whose life embodies courage, integrity, and devotion to others.

From small-town Connecticut to the jungles of Vietnam, from the halls of military hospitals to the quiet mentorship of veterans in Hawaii, his story reflects a lifetime of service both in and out of uniform.

Joseph Robert (Bob) Kerrey

Navy SEAL to US Senator

Joseph Robert Kerrey (Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Joseph Robert "Bob" Kerrey entered the world on August 27, 1943, in the quiet Midwest city of Lincoln, Nebraska. The third of seven children, he grew up in a bustling household shaped by the values of hard work, personal responsibility, and resilience - principles instilled by his father, James Henry Kerrey, a builder and businessman, and his mother, Elinor Fern, an instructor at the University of Nebraska. It was a home where books, debates, and discipline were constant companions. Yet nothing in his early life could have hinted fully at the extraordinary and at times controversial path he would carve through American history.

Kerrey's childhood unfolded in Lincoln's public schools, culminating with his graduation from Lincoln Northeast High School in 1961. Friends and teachers recalled a young man who blended ambition with disarmingly direct honesty - a trait that would later define his political style. After high school, he remained close to home, enrolling at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he pursued a degree in pharmacy. College life broadened his world. He pledged the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity and gained entrance into the university's prestigious Innocents Society, a mark of both leadership and intellect. He completed his Bachelor of Science degree in 1966, seemingly headed toward a stable professional life. But the world beyond Nebraska had other plans.

That same year, the Vietnam War was escalating, and Kerrey made the choice that would alter every chapter of his life to come: he enlisted in the United States Navy. He completed Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island, and soon entered the legendary crucible of BUD/S training in Coronado, California. In December 1967 he graduated with Class 42, earning his place among the Navy SEALs. By January 1969, he was deployed to Vietnam as an assistant platoon commander with SEAL Team 1.

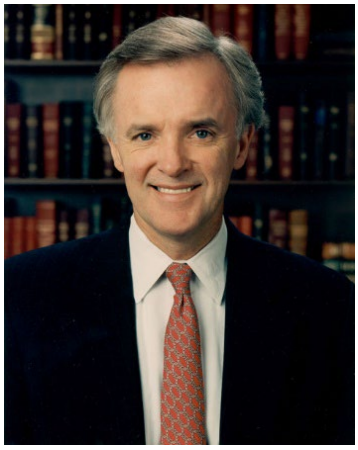
On March 14, 1969, during a nighttime mission on Hon Trẹ Island near Nha Trang Bay, his team was ambushed. An explosion from a grenade tore into him, costing him the lower part of his right leg. Even as he lay severely wounded, he continued directing his men, actions for which he would later receive the Medal of Honor. The award, presented by President Richard Nixon in May 1970, acknowledged a moment of courage - but it could not encapsulate the full cost of the war.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a SEAL team leader during action against enemy aggressor (Viet Cong) forces. Acting in response to reliable intelligence, Lt. (j.g.) Kerrey led his SEAL team on a mission to capture important members of the enemy's area political cadre known to be located on an island in the bay of Nha Trang. In order to surprise the enemy, he and his team scaled a 350-foot sheer cliff to place themselves above the ledge on which the enemy was located. Splitting his team in two elements and coordinating both, Lt. (j.g.) Kerrey led his men in the treacherous downward descent to the enemy's camp. Just as they neared the end of their descent, intense enemy fire was directed at them, and Lt. (j.g.) Kerrey received massive injuries from a grenade which exploded at his feet and threw him backward on the jagged rocks. Although bleeding profusely and suffering great pain, he displayed outstanding courage and presence of mind in immediately directing his element's fire into the heart of the enemy camp. Utilizing his radioman, Lt. (j.g.) Kerrey called in a second element's fire support which caught the confused Viet Cong in a devastating crossfire. After successfully suppressing the enemy's fire, and although immobilized by his multiple wounds, he continued to maintain calm, superlative control as he ordered his team to secure and defend an extraction site. Lt. (j.g.) Kerrey resolutely directed his men, despite his near-unconscious state, until he was eventually evacuated by helicopter. The havoc brought to the enemy by this very successful mission cannot be over-estimated. The enemy soldiers who were captured provided critical intelligence to the allied effort. Lt. (j.g.) Kerrey's courageous and inspiring leadership, valiant fighting spirit, and tenacious devotion to duty in the face of almost overwhelming opposition sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Beyond Service

Medically discharged from the Navy, Kerrey returned to Nebraska to rebuild a life suddenly altered. He poured himself into business, launching and operating a chain of restaurants, Grandmother's Skillet, as well as fitness centers, a bowling alley, and various real-estate ventures. His success as an entrepreneur brought him financial stability and public visibility. By the early 1980s, Kerrey had become a recognizable civic figure - direct, candid, and unafraid of tough conversations. Politics soon beckoned.



Joseph Robert Kerrey Official portrait, 2006 (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

In 1982, he ran for Governor of Nebraska. With little political experience but undeniable personal magnetism, he won. His term as governor from 1983 to 1987 was marked by efforts to modernize state government, reform welfare, and improve education. He governed with a mix of pragmatism and boldness, occasionally drawing criticism but often attracting admiration for his forthrightness. Declining to run for a second term, he instead set his sights on national office.

Kerrey was elected to the United States Senate in 1988 and re-elected in 1994, serving twelve years in Washington. When Kerrey left the Senate in 2001, he became President of The New School in New York City. After nearly a decade, he resigned.

In his personal life, Kerrey married twice - first to Beverley Defnall, with whom he had two children, and later to Sarah Paley, with whom he shares a son. He has remained active in public life, serving on boards, commissions, and advocacy groups, always engaging, always challenging, always pushing forward. Kerrey's life is a study in contrasts - heroism and controversy, public service and private struggle, deep wounds and ambitious rebuilding.

Robert R. Ingram

Accidental Navy Corpsman

Robert R. Ingram (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Robert Roland Ingram was born on January 20, 1945, in the quiet coastal community of Clearwater, Florida. Like many children born in the waning months of World War II, he entered a country confident in victory and military success. His early life remains largely unrecorded in public archives.

Ingram completed high school in 1963. Barely eighteen years old and eager to serve, he enlisted in the United States Navy later that year from Coral Gables. His initial ambition was to pursue aviation electronics. But fate intervened early: a bout of pneumonia during recruit training landed him in the hospital ward. There, while recovering, he observed the quiet professionalism and steadfast compassion of the Navy's hospital corpsmen. Their example changed the trajectory of his life. Ingram requested reassignment, entering Hospital Corps School in San Diego before completing advanced training with the Fleet Marine Force at Camp Pendleton.

By the spring of 1965, Ingram was attached as a Navy corpsman to the storied 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment - the same regiment that had earned renown on the islands of the Pacific two decades earlier. From Okinawa, he deployed to Vietnam, where the war was shifting from an advisory effort into a brutal, full-scale conflict. For the Marines with whom he served, Ingram was more than a medic. He was the lifeline - part healer, part counselor, part comrade.

On February 8, 1966, during an intense firefight, Ingram repeatedly exposed himself to heavy enemy fire to reach the wounded. He treated more than a dozen Marines that day, an action for which he would later receive the Silver Star. For most men, such heroism would stand as the defining moment of their service. For Robert Ingram, it was only the beginning.

On March 28, 1966, in Quang Ngai Province, Company C of 1/7 Marines walked into a massive, well-prepared enemy ambush. Automatic weapons fire erupted from hidden positions on three sides, ripping into the platoon with devastating effect. When the first Marines fell, Ingram sprinted forward without hesitation. A bullet tore through his hand almost immediately, but he pressed on, crawling from one casualty to another across open ground swept by machine-gun fire. He dragged the wounded to cover, administered life-saving treatment, and whispered encouragement to those fading in and out of consciousness.

Three more rounds struck him - one collapsing a lung - yet Ingram refused evacuation, insisting others be pulled out first. At one point he continued treating Marines while lying in a growing pool of his own blood. His fellow corpsmen later recalled that no matter how many times he was hit, he kept moving, kept fighting for every breath, kept reaching for the next wounded Marine. By the end of the battle, he had saved numerous lives, and when rescuers finally pulled him from the field, he was initially tagged as killed in action. His survival bordered on the miraculous. For his actions that day, Robert R. Ingram was awarded the Medal of Honor. More than thirty years passed before the recognition was formally bestowed.

On July 10, 1998, in a ceremony at the White House, President Bill Clinton placed the medal around his neck, honoring not just the courage of a single man, but the unwavering devotion of Navy corpsmen throughout history. The delay was attributable to lost paperwork.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Corpsman with Company C, First Battalion, Seventh Marines against elements of a North Vietnam Aggressor (NVA) battalion in Quang Ngai Province Republic of Vietnam on 28 March 1966. Petty Officer Ingram accompanied the point platoon as it aggressively dispatched an outpost of an NVA battalion. The momentum of the attack rolled off a ridge line down a tree covered slope to a small paddy and a village beyond. Suddenly, the village tree line exploded with an intense hail of automatic rifle fire from approximately 100 North Vietnamese regulars. In mere moments, the platoon ranks were decimated. Oblivious to the danger, Petty Officer Ingram crawled across the bullet spattered terrain to reach a downed Marine. As he administered aid, a bullet went through the palm of his hand. Calls for "CORPSMAN" echoed across the ridge. Bleeding, he edged across the fire swept landscape, collecting ammunition from the dead and administering aid to the wounded. Receiving two more wounds before realizing the third wound was life-threatening, he looked for a way off the face of the ridge, but again he heard the call for corpsman and again, he resolutely answered. Though severely wounded three times, he rendered aid to those incapable until he finally reached the right flank of the platoon. While dressing the head wound of another corpsman, he sustained his fourth bullet wound. From sixteen hundred hours until just prior to sunset, Petty Officer Ingram pushed, pulled, cajoled, and doctored his Marines. Enduring the pain from his many wounds and disregarding the probability of his demise, Petty Officer Ingram's intrepid actions saved many lives that day. By his indomitable fighting spirit, daring initiative, and unfaltering dedication to duty, Petty Officer Ingram reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Beyond Service

After leaving the Navy in 1968, Ingram returned to Florida and pursued a career in nursing. He earned his credentials as a registered nurse and went on to serve in hospitals and medical practices

throughout the state. Eventually he became the operations manager for a family medical practice in Jacksonville, bringing to civilian healthcare the same discipline, compassion, and calm under pressure that had once steadied him amid the chaos of combat.

Ingram married and raised two children - a son and a daughter - preferring a life of humility and service over the spotlight that often follows Medal of Honor recipients. Yet he remained active in veterans' causes, education initiatives, and community events. He frequently spoke to students and military audiences, sharing not tales of glory but lessons in responsibility, courage, and the cost of war. In 2004, the Naval Branch Health Clinic at Mayport, Florida, was named in his honor - a fitting tribute to a man whose life's work centered on healing others.

Perhaps the most profound legacy of Robert R. Ingram is not merely that he saved lives - but that he devoted his own life to the act of saving. From the jungles of Vietnam to the clinics of Florida, his purpose never changed. He was, and remains, a healer.

Drew D. Dix

Goal to be a Green Beret

Drew D. Dix (Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Drew Dennis Dix was born on December 14, 1944, within the storied grounds of West Point, New York. Although little family history is recorded, his father was likely stationed at West Point during WWII. When his family relocated to Pueblo, Colorado, Drew found himself in a town defined by steel mills, hard work, and the plainspoken honesty of working-class America. He graduated from Centennial High School. It was there, amid the grit and simplicity of Pueblo's neighborhoods, that he forged the core values that would shape his adulthood: responsibility, perseverance, and loyalty.

In 1962, at eighteen, he enlisted. He soon proved himself earning the wings of a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division, absorbed into a world where young men learned to jump from aircraft, fight in darkness, and adapt to chaos. His time with the 82nd included a deployment to the Dominican Republic during Operation Power Pack, where he saw urban combat firsthand and learned what it meant to lead under pressure.

But Drew's ambitions reached beyond airborne operations. Since childhood, he wanted to be a Green Beret. They were America's special forces unconventional warriors, trained to live among foreign cultures, train indigenous fighters, and operate independently behind enemy lines. At eighteen, he had been too young to join their ranks, but after several years of service he finally had the opportunity. After intensive assessment and training, he earned the coveted Special Forces tab and the green beret itself. It suited him. The role required intelligence, adaptability, and moral steadiness - qualities he possessed in abundance.

By 1968, he was a Staff Sergeant assigned to Vietnam, operating as a Special Forces adviser in the provincial capital of Chau Phu near the Cambodian border. Things intensified with the Tet Offensive.

In the early morning hours of January 31, 1968, two Viet Cong battalions launched a sudden, coordinated assault on Chau Phu. Explosions ripped through the streets and enemy troops overran key positions. Amid the confusion, the city's defenses began to falter. For the next 56 hours - nearly two and a half days without rest - Dix led impromptu assault teams of South Vietnamese soldiers, local militia, and willing volunteers in a desperate fight to reclaim the city.

He rescued trapped Americans and civilians under heavy fire. He stormed enemy-held buildings, entering first, clearing rooms with extraordinary calm. In one operation, he fought his way into a

residence where several civilians were held, eliminating the guards and carrying the captives to safety. Across the city, he captured or killed numerous enemy fighters, including a Viet Cong province official directing the attack. His audacity and leadership stabilized what could have become a catastrophic collapse.

In January 1969, President Lyndon B. Johnson placed the Medal of Honor around his neck, making him the first enlisted Special Forces soldier ever to receive the nation's highest decoration for valor. The Army soon commissioned him, and he continued serving until 1982, retiring as a Major after two decades of distinguished service.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. S/Sgt. Dix distinguished himself by exceptional heroism while serving as a unit adviser. Two heavily armed Viet Cong battalions attacked the province capital city of Chau Phu resulting in the complete breakdown and fragmentation of the defenses of the city. S/Sgt. Dix, with a patrol of Vietnamese soldiers, was recalled to assist in defense of Chau Phu. Learning that a nurse was trapped in a house near the center of the city, S/Sgt. Dix organized a relief force, successfully rescued the nurse, and returned her to the safety of the Tactical Operations Center. Being informed of other trapped civilians within the city, S/Sgt. Dix voluntarily led another force to rescue eight civilian employees located in a building which was under heavy mortar and small-arms fire. S/Sgt. Dix then returned to the center of the city. Upon approaching a building, he was subjected to intense automatic rifle and machine-gun fire from an unknown number of Viet Cong. He personally assaulted the building, killing six Viet Cong, and rescuing two Filipinos. The following day S/Sgt. Dix, still on his own volition, assembled a 20-man force and though under intense enemy fire cleared the Viet Cong out of the hotel, theater, and other adjacent buildings within the city. During this portion of the attack, Army of the Republic of Vietnam soldiers, inspired by the heroism and success of SSgt. Dix, rallied and commenced firing upon the Viet Cong. S/Sgt. Dix captured 20 prisoners, including a high-ranking Viet Cong official. He then attacked enemy troops who had entered the residence of the Deputy Province Chief and was successful in rescuing the official's wife and children. S/Sgt. Dix's personal heroic actions resulted in 14 confirmed Viet Cong killed in action and possibly 25 more, the capture of 20 prisoners, 15 weapons, and the rescue of the 14 United States and free-world civilians. The heroism of S/Sgt. Dix was in the highest tradition and reflects great credit upon the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

Retirement did not diminish his drive. In Alaska, he became a security consultant, operated an air service, and later served in the state's homeland security leadership. He also wrote *The Rescue of River City*, recounting the fierce battle for Chau Phu. In 2010, he co-founded the Center for American Values in Pueblo, a nonprofit devoted to teaching integrity, patriotism, and civic responsibility through the stories of Medal of Honor recipients.

Through every chapter of his life Drew Dennis Dix embodied the principles he fought for. His courage was unmistakable, but so too was his humility. His story stands as a testament not only to battlefield heroism but to the enduring impact of a life dedicated to service.

Gary L. Littrell

Orphan Raised by Grandparents & U.S. Army

Gary L. Littrell, U.S. Army retired (*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

In Henderson, Kentucky, Gary Lee Littrell was born on October 26, 1944. Gary was only five years old when his mother died unexpectedly. His father drifted out of his life soon after, leaving the young boy in the care of his grandparents on their modest farm. It was there, amid the rolling fields and daily chores of rural Kentucky, that he learned self-reliance, discipline, and perseverance.

One formative moment would set his life on an irreversible trajectory. At the age of nine, his uncle drove him to Fort Campbell, home of the famed 101st Airborne Division, to watch the paratroopers jump. He decided then that he, too, would someday wear the parachutist's wings.

At seventeen, one day after his birthday, Littrell walked into a recruiter's office and enlisted in the U.S. Army. His early assignments sent him across the Pacific to Okinawa, where he served in the 503rd Regiment, later the core of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. There, far from Kentucky, he built a new life - marrying a local woman, Mitsue, and eventually becoming the father of two sons. Littrell quickly gained a reputation as a calm professional, the kind of soldier who could be depended upon in any circumstance.

He continued to sharpen his capabilities, completing Ranger School - one of the Army's most demanding programs - and later returning as an instructor. Leadership came naturally to him, forged by hardship, strengthened by experience, and recognized by every man who served under him.

By 1969, the Vietnam War was escalating, and Littrell volunteered to join the fight. He was assigned as a Light Weapons Infantry Advisor with Advisory Team 21 of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, attached to the 23rd Battalion, 2nd Ranger Group of the ARVN.

Advisors lived, moved, and fought alongside their Vietnamese counterparts. They were instructors, emissaries, brothers-in-arms - and, when needed, lifelines. In April 1970, those roles converged in the mountains of Kontum Province, near Dak Seang, where Littrell and three other American advisors accompanied a battalion of 400 Vietnamese Rangers. On April 4, 1970, the battalion was encircled on a remote hilltop by a North Vietnamese force several times its size. Mortar fire and recoilless rifles tore into their perimeter. In the first barrage, the Vietnamese battalion commander

was killed, and two of the four American advisors were mortally wounded. Only Gary Littrell remained fully capable - and he was suddenly responsible for the survival of the entire battalion.

For four unbroken days and nights, Littrell performed what others would later call impossible. He moved ceaselessly across the battlefield under “devastating fire,” shouting encouragement in Vietnamese, directing air and artillery strikes, redistributing ammunition, treating the wounded, strengthening defensive positions, and refusing every instinct for self-preservation.

He seemed to be everywhere at once. His uniform became so filled with holes from shrapnel and bullets that one Ranger later said it was miraculous he remained alive. When the siege finally lifted on April 8, the 23rd Ranger Battalion had survived almost entirely because of one man’s resolve.

Three years later, in a quiet ceremony at the White House on October 15, 1973, President Richard Nixon placed the Medal of Honor around Command Sergeant Major Littrell’s neck.

His citation reads

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sfc. Littrell, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Advisory Team 21, distinguished himself while serving as a Light Weapons Infantry adviser with the 23d Battalion, 2d Ranger Group, Republic of Vietnam Army, near Dak Seang. After establishing a defensive perimeter on a hill on 4 April, the battalion was subjected to an intense enemy mortar attack which killed the Vietnamese commander, one adviser, and seriously wounded all the advisers except Sfc. Littrell. During the ensuing four days, Sfc. Littrell exhibited near superhuman endurance as he singlehandedly bolstered the besieged battalion. Repeatedly abandoning positions of relative safety, he directed artillery and air support by day and marked the unit's location by night, despite the heavy, concentrated enemy fire. His dauntless will instilled in the men of the 23d Battalion a deep desire to resist. Assault after assault was repulsed as the battalion responded to the extraordinary leadership and personal example exhibited by Sfc. Littrell as he continuously moved to those points most seriously threatened by the enemy, redistributed ammunition, strengthened faltering defenses, cared for the wounded, and shouted encouragement to the Vietnamese in their own language. When the beleaguered battalion was finally ordered to withdraw, numerous ambushes were encountered. Sfc. Littrell repeatedly prevented widespread disorder by directing air strikes to within 50 meters of their position. Through his indomitable courage and complete disregard for his safety, he averted excessive loss of life and injury to the members of the battalion. The sustained extraordinary courage and selflessness displayed by Sfc. Littrell over an extended period of time were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him and the U.S. Army.

Littrell himself rarely spoke of the battle. Like many who witnessed such violence, he carried the memories with humility, often shifting attention to the bravery of the Vietnamese Rangers who had fought beside him.

Littrell continued his Army career for more than a decade after Vietnam, eventually rising to the rank of Command Sergeant Major, the highest enlisted rank. His leadership influenced generations of soldiers before his retirement in the mid-1980s.

Beyond Service

But retirement did not mark an end to service. Settling in St. Pete Beach, Florida, he began work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, counseling veterans and guiding those struggling to transition from war back to civilian life. He became a pillar of the community, an advocate for integrity and patriotism, and twice served as President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

Later, through his foundation Tribute to Valor, he traveled the country speaking to students about character, sacrifice, and what he called “the most important word in the world” - integrity. To thousands of young people, he became not just a hero of war, but a mentor of peace.

In 2015, a bridge in his Florida community was renamed to honor him - a permanent reminder that courage is not only something displayed in battle, but something practiced each day in quiet acts of leadership and service.

Gary Lee Littrell’s story is the story of a boy shaped by loss, a teenager drawn to service, a soldier forged in airborne tradition, and a man who used his greatest trial not as a burden but as a testament.

Brian M. Thacker

Air Force Brat to Army Officer

Brian M. Thacker (Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Brian Miles Thacker from Columbus, Ohio was born on April 25, 1945 - just days before the guns of World War II fell silent in Europe. It was a moment when America stood at the threshold of peace yet remained deeply entangled in global responsibilities. For the Thacker family, service was already a tradition, one that would shape Brian's birth, his childhood, and ultimately, his destiny.

His father, Elmer Thacker, served in the United States Air Force in WWII and Korea rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His mother, Mary Thacker, anchored the family through the frequent relocations that accompanied military life, raising their children with a sense of resilience and unity. Brian grew up as the only son with three sisters, a tight-knit quartet of siblings navigating the upheaval and adventure that accompanied being what he later described as an "Air-Force brat."

Military bases were Brian's playgrounds, classrooms, and communities. He learned early on how to adjust to new surroundings, make friends quickly, and observe the unspoken rhythms of military life. As the children grew, the family moved frequently, following Elmer's assignments. High school for Brian was as transient as his early childhood. It was from Utah that Brian would later qualify for in-state tuition at Weber State University.

After graduating high school and enrolling at Weber State College (today Weber State University), he studied business management and joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). For the first time in his life, he was not just a military dependent. He was becoming a service member.

He earned his degree in 1969 and received his commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Initial assignments were in Germany but ultimately, he was sent to Vietnam. In March of 1971, in the mountains of Kontum Province would test the Air Force brat.

Thacker earned the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism during one of the most desperate engagements of the Vietnam War. On March 31, 1971, Thacker - then a First Lieutenant with Battery A, 1st Battalion, 92nd Field Artillery Regiment - was serving as the senior American advisor at Fire Support Base 6 in the Kontum Province. When North Vietnamese forces launched a massive, coordinated assault on the outnumbered South Vietnamese troops, Thacker assumed responsibility for coordinating the defense. Under ferocious fire, he moved from position to

position, rallying soldiers, directing airstrikes, and adjusting artillery fire while exposed to intense enemy attack.

As the perimeter collapsed and the situation became untenable, Thacker made a critical decision to retreat. He stayed behind alone to provide covering fire. Severely wounded and surrounded, military author Scott Baron notes “he called in a U.S. artillery barrage on his own position in a desperate effort to keep the enemy at bay and purchase more time for his men to withdraw.” Thacker was presumed killed. However, Thacker survived by evading enemy troops for eight days in the jungle before crawling out to finally being rescued.

President Richard Nixon presented the medal in October 1973.

President Nixon presenting the Medal of Honor to Brian M. Thacker (Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. 1st Lt. Thacker, Field Artillery, Battery A, distinguished himself while serving as the team leader of an Integrated Observation System collocated with elements of two Army of the Republic of Vietnam units at Fire Base 6. A numerically superior North Vietnamese Army force launched a well-planned dawn attack on the small, isolated, hilltop fire base. Employing rockets,

grenades, flamethrowers, and automatic weapons, the enemy forces penetrated the perimeter defenses and engaged the defenders in hand-to-hand combat. Throughout the morning and early afternoon, 1st Lt. Thacker rallied and encouraged the U.S. and Republic of Vietnam soldiers in heroic efforts to repulse the enemy. He occupied a dangerously exposed observation position for a period of four hours while directing friendly air strikes and artillery fire against the assaulting enemy forces. His personal bravery and inspired leadership enabled the outnumbered friendly forces to inflict a maximum of casualties on the attacking enemy forces and prevented the base from being overrun. By late afternoon, the situation had become untenable. 1st Lt. Thacker organized and directed the withdrawal of the remaining friendly forces. With complete disregard for his personal safety, he remained inside the perimeter alone to provide covering fire with his M-16 rifle until all other friendly forces had escaped from the besieged fire base. Then, in an act of supreme courage, he called for friendly artillery fire on his own position to allow his comrades more time to withdraw safely from the area and, at the same time, inflict even greater casualties on the enemy forces. Although wounded and unable to escape from the area himself, he successfully eluded the enemy forces for eight days until friendly forces regained control of the fire base. The extraordinary courage and selflessness displayed by 1st Lt. Thacker were an inspiration to his comrades and are in the highest traditions of the military service.

Beyond Service

Following his military service, Thacker continued a life defined by quiet dedication rather than public acclaim. In 1975, he joined the Department of Veterans Affairs, beginning a 26-year career advocating for the welfare of America's veterans. He worked in administrative and support roles, eventually rising to become Chief of Management Support Services in Washington, D.C. Throughout his career, he remained a steadfast presence within the veteran community, speaking with students, attending military events, and offering support to Gold Star families and fellow service members. Thacker remained deeply engaged in public service. His alma mater, Weber State University, honored him with a scholarship in his name, reflecting his commitment to education and civic responsibility.

Allen J. Lynch

Bullied Zero to Hero

Allen J. Lynch
(via homeofheroes.com)

Chicago's South Side was the birthplace on October 28, 1945, for Allen James Lynch, the son of a quiet World War II veteran and a mother who kept the household running with the steady resolve of someone who expected nothing and worked for everything. The Lynch home was modest, a place where discipline was not merely encouraged but lived. His father believed in early mornings, chores done right the first time, and the unspoken lesson that responsibility was a kind of armor no one could take away.

Allen was the kid always on the outside. Too small, too quiet, and too unsure. Allen became the boy others singled out. The bullying began subtly but it soon grew into shoves and punches. Entire days became battles for survival of a different kind.

Bullying has many forms - humiliation, exclusion, intimidation - and young Allen experienced all of them. It drained him. He later said it "sucked the life right out of me," a quiet confession of how deeply it cut.

He had academic struggles. Freshman-year algebra defeated him, and the humiliation of failing a class only compounded the daily assaults on his confidence. The bullying and academic failure was creating survival and resilience instincts.

The Army recruiter's office was not the glowing beacon of hope but a last chance for a change. For Allen, it was a chance to escape his troubles. He enlisted in 1964, carrying with him the scars of childhood but also the hard-earned grit that would one day save lives.

By 1967, the war in Vietnam had escalated, and Allen was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He became a radio-telephone operator, a job both vital and deadly. To carry a radio was to be a lifeline - but also a target. He accepted the risk without bravado. Quiet competence had become a defining trait.

Then came December 15, 1967 - a date that would follow him for the rest of his life. His platoon was moving near My An village in Binh Dinh Province when they were caught in a violent and sudden attack. Automatic weapons fire erupted from hidden positions. In that terrible moment, Allen saw three wounded soldiers lying exposed in the open. He could have stayed down. He could have waited. He ran.

Bullets cracked around him as he dragged the first wounded man to cover. Then he went back for the second. And the third. He shielded them with his own body as he assessed their wounds and returned fire. When his company pulled back, believing all survivors had been accounted for, Allen refused to leave the men he'd saved. He stayed behind. Alone.

For two hours he held his position, fighting off enemy probes, conserving ammunition, refusing to give up the ground that protected his wounded brothers. When reinforcements finally arrived, he helped evacuate the injured - still refusing to leave until everyone was safe.

On May 14, 1970, President Richard Nixon placed the Medal of Honor around Allen's neck at the White House.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sgt. Lynch (then Sp4c.) distinguished himself while serving as a radio telephone operator with Company D. While serving in the forward element on an operation near the village of My An, his unit became heavily engaged with a numerically superior enemy force. Quickly and accurately assessing the situation, Sgt. Lynch provided his commander with information which subsequently proved essential to the unit's successful actions. Observing three wounded comrades lying exposed to enemy fire, Sgt. Lynch dashed across 50 meters of open ground through a withering hail of enemy fire to administer aid. Reconnoitering a nearby trench for a covered position to protect the wounded from intense hostile fire, he killed two enemy soldiers at point-blank range. With the trench cleared, he unhesitatingly returned to the fire-swept area three times to carry the wounded men to safety. When his company was forced to withdraw by the superior firepower of the enemy, Sgt. Lynch remained to aid his comrades at the risk of his life rather than abandon them. Alone, he defended his isolated position for two hours against the advancing enemy. Using only his rifle and a grenade, he stopped them just short of his trench, killing five. Again, disregarding his safety in the face of withering hostile fire, he crossed 70 meters of exposed terrain five times to carry his wounded comrades to a more secure area. Once he had assured their comfort and safety, Sgt. Lynch located the counterattacking friendly company to assist in directing the attack and evacuating the three casualties. His gallantry at the risk of his life is in the highest traditions of the military service. Sgt. Lynch has reflected great credit on himself, the 12th Cavalry, and the U.S. Army.

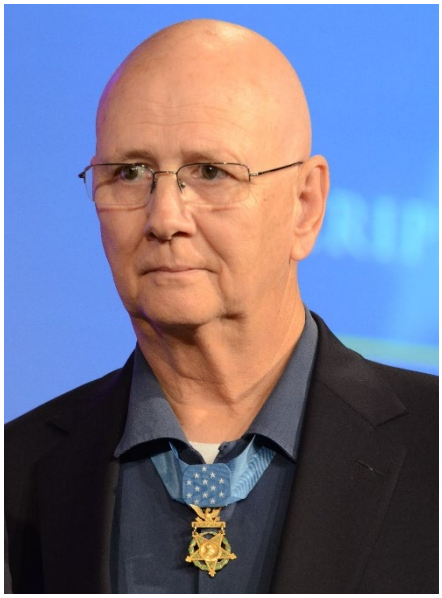
Beyond Service

Coming home from Vietnam did not mean the war was over. For Allen, a different kind of struggle began. He married Susan, the woman whose steady presence helped anchor him, and together

they built a family: three children and, later, grandchildren who filled the home with noise and warmth he had once feared he might never have. Nightmares shadowed his sleep. Loud noises made his body react before his mind understood. The survivor instinct that had saved him became, at times, a burden he could not easily shed.

He did what he had always done - he pushed through it. When he published his memoir, *Zero to Hero*, he did so not to celebrate his achievements but to tell the truth: he had been a bullied kid looking for his place in the world. The Army gave him that place. Vietnam tested it. And life after war demanded as much courage as any firefight he had survived.

Allen found purpose in serving others, especially veterans. Over the years he worked in a series of roles that gave him direct contact with the men and women who had worn the uniform: a Veterans Benefits Counselor, Chief of Ambulatory Care at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and later the Executive Director of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Illinois. Eventually he became Chief of the Veterans Rights Bureau at the Illinois Attorney General's Office.



Allen J. Lynch
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Eventually, he and his family founded the Allen J. Lynch Medal of Honor Veterans Foundation, providing financial assistance and crisis support for veterans in need. It became an extension of his life's mission: to ensure no one was left behind, whether on the battlefield or in civilian life. Through it all, he repeated a simple creed: "Others, Not Self."

James C. McCloughan

Sports Star & A Promise to God

Jim McCloughan was born on April 30, 1946, in the bucolic community of South Haven, Michigan. Soon after his birth, his family settled on a farm in nearby Bangor, where hard work was not merely encouraged but expected. The rhythms of farm life shaped him early: long days in the fields, chores before sunrise, a household where persistence was the currency of character. Yet even amid the rigors of rural living, young Jim found room to dream, discovering in athletics an outlet for his boundless energy and competitive spirit.

At Bangor High School, McCloughan became a standout athlete, excelling in four varsity sports - football, baseball, basketball, and wrestling. For McCloughan, athletics were never simply games; they were a proving ground for discipline, teamwork, and sacrifice.

McCloughan chose Olivet College, where he continued his athletic journey in football, baseball, and wrestling. He pursued a bachelor's degree in sociology. He graduated in 1968 with a teaching certificate in hand, ready to return to the classrooms and gymnasiums of Michigan as a teacher and coach. But history intervened. In August 1968, his draft notice arrived.

Basic training at Fort Knox introduced him to the rigors of Army life, but it was at Fort Sam Houston - where he trained as a combat medic because of his sports experiences. He told his story to Veterans Radio. Seemingly a random selection to be a medic, McCloughan absorbed the medical lessons quickly. Medics were needed because of the attrition rate in Vietnam. He earned the military occupational specialty of 91B20, Combat Medic, and soon after was assigned to Company C, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division. McCloughan's Vietnam tour began in March 1969. Everything came to a head in mid-May 1969, during the brutal battle near Tam Ky and Nui Yon Hill.

James C. McLoughan, 1969
(*via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain*)

Over May 13–15, "Doc" McCloughan repeatedly charged into heavy fire - rifles, machine guns, RPGs bursting around him - to treat and evacuate the wounded. He ignored his own injuries, refusing medical evacuation even when ordered to the rear. Again and again, he carried fallen comrades to safety, fought alongside his brothers-in-arms, and held the perimeter when others were too wounded or exhausted to continue. It was, in every sense, hell on earth.

He returned home in March 1970, his service complete, his rank Specialist 5. Yet it was not until July 31, 2017 - almost fifty years after the battle - that he received the nation's highest military honor. The medal was presented by President Donald J. Trump.

His citation reads:

> Private First Class James C. McCloughan distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty from May 13 - 15, 1969, while serving as a combat medic with Company C, 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division. The company air assaulted into an area near Tam Ky and Nui Yon Hill. On May 13th, with complete disregard for his life, he ran 100 meters in an open field through heavy fire to rescue a comrade too injured to move and carried him to safety. That same day, 2d Platoon was ordered to search the area near Nui Yon Hill when the platoon was ambushed by a large North Vietnamese Army force and sustained heavy casualties. With complete disregard for his life and personal safety, Private First Class McCloughan led two Americans into the safety of a trench while being wounded by shrapnel from a rocket propelled grenade. He ignored a direct order to stay back and braved an enemy assault while moving into the "kill zone" on four more occasions to extract wounded comrades. He treated the injured, prepared the evacuation, and though bleeding heavily from shrapnel wounds on his head and body, refused evacuation to safety in order to remain at the battle site with his fellow Soldiers who were heavily outnumbered by North Vietnamese Army forces. On May 14th, the platoon was again ordered to move out towards Nui Yon Hill. Private First Class McCloughan was wounded a second time by small arms fire and shrapnel from a rocket propelled grenade while rendering aid to two Soldiers in an open rice paddy. In the final phases of the attack, two companies from the 2d North Vietnamese Army Division and an element of 700 soldiers from a Viet Cong regiment descended upon Company C's position on three sides. Private First Class McCloughan, again with complete disregard for his life, went into the crossfire numerous times throughout the battle to extract wounded Soldiers, while also fighting the enemy. His relentless and courageous actions inspired and motivated his comrades to fight for their survival. When supplies ran low, Private First Class McCloughan volunteered to hold a blinking strobe light in an open area as a marker for a nighttime resupply drop. He remained steadfast while bullets landed all around him and rocket propelled grenades flew over his prone, exposed body. During the morning darkness of May 15th, Private First Class McCloughan knocked out a rocket propelled grenade position with a grenade, fought and eliminated enemy soldiers, treated numerous casualties, kept two critically wounded Soldiers alive during the night, and organized the dead and wounded for evacuation at daylight. His timely and courageous actions were instrumental in saving the lives of his fellow Soldiers. Private First Class McCloughan's personal heroism, professional competence, and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Americal Division, and the United States Army.

He recounted to Veterans Radio that when on that hill he talked to God. He asked God to get him out alive and if he did, he would tell his Dad he loved him and would work to be the best possible coach to young men. He did survive and kept his promise to God.

Beyond Service

Back in Michigan, he returned to teaching, reclaiming his identity as an educator and coach. Following his return from Vietnam and his transition back into civilian life, McCloughan married Chérie McCloughan, who would become his lifelong partner and an essential source of support throughout his postwar years.

James C. McCloughan
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Like countless others returning from combat, McCloughan carried the psychological and emotional weight of war - memories of intense violence, loss of comrades, and the moral strain of battlefield medicine. Chérie played a central role in helping him rebuild a sense of normalcy and purpose, providing steadiness as he resumed his calling as an educator and coach.

Together, James and Chérie built a blended family centered on mutual responsibility and care. McCloughan is the father of three biological children - two sons, Jamie and Matt, and a daughter, Kami - as well as a stepdaughter, Kara. The children were grown by the time Doc received the Medal of Honor.

At South Haven High School, he spent nearly four decades shaping young lives - teaching sociology and psychology, coaching wrestling for 22 years and football and baseball for 38. His impact earned him induction into multiple sports halls of fame, honors from the Michigan Education Association, and the enduring gratitude of generations of students.

McCloughan's professional life as a teacher and coach often required long hours, but his presence as a parent was marked by consistency and engagement. He applied the same principles at home that guided him on the battlefield and in education: protect those entrusted to you, do the work thoroughly, and never ask others to do what you would not do yourself.

The McCloughan family maintained a relatively private life, even after James received national recognition. When he was awarded the Medal of Honor in 2017 - nearly five decades after his actions in Vietnam - his family stood prominently at his side. The ceremony underscored not only his individual heroism but also the collective sacrifice of military families who endure uncertainty, absence, and long-term consequences alongside their loved ones.

James C. McCloughan's journey - from a Michigan farm to the killing fields of Vietnam, then back to the classrooms and gymnasiums of his home state - is the story of a man who lived his values, protected his brothers, and devoted his life to others. It is the story of a hero shaped long before he earned the medal and remembered long after the battle ended.

Donald E. Ballard

Navy Corpsman Jumps Dud Grenade

Donald E. Ballard *(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)*

Donald Everett Ballard was born on December 5, 1945, in Kansas City, Missouri, during the final months of World War II. His early life was rooted in the working-class neighborhoods of the Kansas City area, where he grew up with a strong sense of duty and responsibility. Ballard attended North Kansas City High School. After graduating, he worked in a dental laboratory and briefly pursued the idea of becoming a dentist. College, however, was financially out of reach.

On December 27, 1965, Ballard enlisted in the United States Navy. He completed recruit training and then the rigorous Hospital Corps School at Great Lakes, Illinois. His natural aptitude for medicine and calm demeanor under pressure made him a strong fit for the demanding role of a Navy Hospital Corpsman. Following a brief assignment at the Naval Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, Ballard received orders that would place him in the heart of the Vietnam War. Trained in emergency care and battlefield triage, he was attached to Company M, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division - one of the Marine Corps' most heavily engaged combat units.

On May 16, 1968, during an ambush in Quảng Trị Province, he repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to treat wounded Marines. When an enemy grenade landed among them, Ballard threw himself onto it, instinctively choosing to sacrifice his own life to save the others. The grenade failed to detonate. Without hesitation, he picked it up, hurled it away, and resumed rendering medical aid.

This "lived to talk about it" act of valor - equal parts courage, selflessness, and instinct - would later earn him the Medal of Honor presented by President Richard Nixon on May 14, 1970.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a HC2c. with Company M, in connection with operations against enemy aggressor forces. During the afternoon hours, Company M was moving to join the remainder of the 3d Battalion in Quang Tri province. After treating and evacuating two heat casualties, HC2c. Ballard was returning to his platoon from the evacuation landing zone when the company was ambushed by a North Vietnamese Army unit employing automatic weapons and mortars, and sustained numerous casualties. Observing a wounded marine, HC2c. Ballard

> unhesitatingly moved across the fire-swept terrain to the injured man and swiftly rendered medical assistance to his comrade. HC2c. Ballard then directed four marines to carry the casualty to a position of relative safety. As the four men prepared to move the wounded marine, an enemy soldier suddenly left his concealed position and, after hurling a hand grenade which landed near the casualty, commenced firing upon the small group of men. Instantly shouting a warning to the marines, HC2c. Ballard fearlessly threw himself upon the lethal explosive device to protect his comrades from the deadly blast. When the grenade failed to detonate, he calmly arose from his dangerous position and resolutely continued his determined efforts in treating other marine casualties. HC2c. Ballard's heroic actions and selfless concern for the welfare of his companions served to inspire all who observed him and prevented possible injury or death to his fellow marines. His courage, daring initiative, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval.

Beyond Service

Ballard left active duty in the Navy in February 1970 as a Hospital Corpsman Second Class. His time on the battlefield had changed him, but his sense of service was undiminished. Rather than stepping away from military life, Ballard chose a new path. Shortly after leaving active duty, he joined the Kansas Army National Guard, where he received his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Medical Service Corps.

Over the next two decades, Ballard rose steadily through the officer ranks to Colonel in 1998. In his later years of service, he was appointed Special Assistant to the Adjutant General of Kansas, where he advised on medical readiness, troop welfare, and emergency preparedness. He retired from the Kansas National Guard in 2000, capping three decades of commissioned leadership and nearly 35 years of combined military service.

After retiring, Ballard continued to give back. He worked as a medical technician with the Kansas City Fire Department, owned and operated funeral homes, and became an active advocate for veterans. His efforts included supporting the creation of a USO facility in downtown Kansas City and participating in numerous veteran outreach initiatives. In 2001, he was inducted into the Kansas National Guard Hall of Fame, a recognition of his decades of service and contribution to the state and nation.

Jack H. Jacobs

Student, Teacher, Businessman, Military Analyst

Jack H. Jacobs *(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)*

Brooklyn, New York-born Jack Jacobs', August 2, 1945, early life unfolded within an immigrant Jewish family whose roots stretched from Greece to Romania to Poland. His family moved often during his childhood, eventually settling in Woodbridge Township, New Jersey. He graduated from Woodbridge High School in the Class of 1962.

Even as a teenager, Jack had an eye for global affairs and the world beyond his immediate surroundings. This interest eventually pulled him toward Rutgers University, where he enrolled in the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps - an ROTC program that would shape the next two decades of his life. At Rutgers, he earned not only a Bachelor of Arts, but later a Master's degree in international relations, studying subjects that would later influence his approach to strategy, leadership, and conflict.

Jacobs served two tours, as an advisor to Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) infantry units. It was dangerous work. Advisors often found themselves exposed, embedded in small units, operating in complex and fluid combat environments.

On March 9, 1968, in the Mekong Delta's Kien Phong Province, Jacobs's life - and the lives of many others - hinged on a series of rapid decisions made under fire. Serving as the assistant battalion advisor, he accompanied a unit that suddenly collided with a dug-in Viet Cong force. Almost instantly the battlefield erupted in chaos. The company commander fell wounded, men were pinned down, and the air filled with bullets, smoke, and confusion.

Jacobs himself was hit early in the fight. Shrapnel and gunfire tore into him, yet he remained conscious - and more importantly, committed. Time and again, he raced across open rice paddies swept by enemy fire, dragging the wounded to safety - one U.S. advisor and thirteen ARVN soldiers in total.

For these extraordinary acts of valor, President Richard Nixon awarded him the Medal of Honor on October 9, 1969.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Jacobs (then 1st Lt.), Infantry, distinguished himself while serving as assistant battalion adviser, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The 2d Battalion was advancing to contact when it came under intense heavy machine-gun and mortar fire from a Viet Cong battalion positioned in well-fortified bunkers. As the 2d Battalion deployed into attack formation, its advance was halted by devastating fire. Capt. Jacobs, with the command element of the lead company, called for and directed air strikes on the enemy positions to facilitate a renewed attack. Due to the intensity of the enemy fire and heavy casualties to the command group, including the company commander, the attack stopped and the friendly troops became disorganized. Although wounded by mortar fragments, Capt. Jacobs assumed command of the allied company, ordered a withdrawal from the exposed position, and established a defensive perimeter. Despite profuse bleeding from head wounds which impaired his vision, Capt. Jacobs, with complete disregard for his safety, returned under intense fire to evacuate a seriously wounded adviser to the safety of a wooded area where he administered lifesaving first aid. He then returned through heavy automatic-weapons fire to evacuate the wounded company commander. Capt. Jacobs made repeated trips across the fire-swept, open rice paddies, evacuating wounded and their weapons. On three separate occasions, Capt. Jacobs contacted and drove off Viet Cong squads who were searching for allied wounded and weapons, single-handedly killing three and wounding several others. His gallant actions and extraordinary heroism saved the lives of one U.S. adviser and 13 allied soldiers. Through his effort the allied company was restored to an effective fighting unit and prevented defeat of the friendly forces by a strong and determined enemy. Capt. Jacobs, by his gallantry and bravery in action in the highest traditions of the military service, has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

But for Jacobs, the medal did not symbolize heroism - it symbolized responsibility. “The real heroes,” he often said, “are the ones who never came back.”

In the years following Vietnam, Jacobs continued to build a distinguished military career. Between operational assignments, he returned to the classroom - not as a student, but as a teacher. From 1973 to 1976 he taught international relations and comparative politics at West Point, mentoring a new generation of future leaders. For a man who held both academic and battlefield experience, it was a natural fit. He understood war not only as a physical struggle, but as a political and human one.

In 1987, after more than two decades of service, Colonel Jacobs hung up his uniform. But retirement would prove to be merely another chapter, not an ending.

Beyond Service

Unlike many career soldiers, Jacobs did not disappear into quiet retirement. Instead, he pivoted into the fast-paced world of finance, co-founding AutoFinance Group, a company that helped revolutionize debt securitization. After its acquisition by KeyBank, he became Managing Director at Bankers Trust, overseeing major institutional trading operations.

Jack J. Jacobs
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Later, his expertise carried him into global real-estate development as a principal. He also became Vice-Chairman of the Medal of Honor Foundation, a trustee of the National World War II Museum, and eventually held the McDermott Chair of Politics at West Point, guiding future cadets with lessons forged in both war and peace.

But to millions of Americans, Jack Jacobs is best known as a steady, insightful voice on national security - thanks to his work as a military analyst for NBC News. His commentary reflects a lifetime of experience, combining clarity, nuance, and an unflinching honesty that viewers have come to trust.

Through all of his achievements, Jacobs has remained grounded by family - his wife Sue, his daughter, and two sons - and by his quiet home in Far Hills, New Jersey. His memoir, *If Not Now, When?* recounts not only the brutality of the battlefield but the enduring question that has guided his life: When is the right time to act?

Alfred V. Rascon

Mexican Citizen to Medic Covering a Grenade

Alfred Velazquez Rascon's journey from a small home in Chihuahua, Mexico, to the East Room of the White House where he received the Medal of Honor is a story woven from courage, humility, and an unwavering devotion to others. His life reflects a profound American truth: that heroism knows no borders, and that one's birthplace matters far less than one's character.

Alfred V. Rascon
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Rascon was born on September 10, 1945, into modest circumstances. His parents, Alfredo and Andrea, sought opportunity beyond what their homeland could offer and moved their young son to the United States. They settled in Oxnard, California, in a neighborhood known as La Colonia, a community rich in Mexican culture and working-class grit.

He grew up fascinated by the military. His childhood friends remembered him tying sheets into makeshift parachutes and imagining himself as an airborne trooper - one such attempt ended with a broken wrist but did little to deter him. High school had shaped him not through accolades but through quiet struggle: learning a new language, helping his family, navigating the complexities of immigrant adolescence, and discovering a calling rooted in compassion. By seventeen upon graduating from Oxnard High School in August 1963, restless and eager to serve, he persuaded his parents to sign the waiver allowing him to enlist in the U.S. Army.

He entered basic training at Fort Ord in California. He quickly distinguished himself as disciplined, physically resilient, and determined. Drawn to the mission of saving lives rather than taking them, he volunteered for medic school at Fort Sam Houston. From there, he requested airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, fulfilling the childhood dream.

After jump school, Rascon deployed with the Medical Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry, part of the newly formed 173rd Airborne Brigade. After months in Okinawa, his unit deployed to Vietnam in May 1965. Rascon was not yet a U.S. citizen; he served under a flag that he had chosen but had not yet legally joined. That would change a year later.

Vietnam was dangerous duty for medics. Those who served with him recalled that he seemed almost indifferent to his own safety, running toward incoming fire rather than away from it. On March 16, 1966, in Long Khánh Province, this quiet medic would earn his place in military history.

That morning, Rascon accompanied a reconnaissance platoon on a mission near the village of Long Bình. Rascon sprinted through the hail of fire to reach the first casualty. As he knelt to treat the wounded soldier, an enemy grenade landed nearby. Without hesitation, he threw his body over the man, absorbing the blast. Shrapnel tore into him. Ignoring his wounds, he dragged the paratrooper to cover and rushed toward another fallen comrade.

The fury of the battle only escalated. Amid the chaos, machine-gun ammunition ran low. When a gunner fell, Rascon crawled forward under fire, reached the casualty, and dragged both the gun and its ammunition back to the American line. Another grenade exploded so close that it hurled him backward, ripping into his face and torso. Barely conscious, he crawled again toward another wounded soldier, shielding him with his own body as he treated him.

His platoon leader, believing Rascon was mortally wounded, ordered others to pull him out. Rascon refused evacuation. He pushed them away, insisting they carry the others first. Only when he collapsed from blood loss was he forcibly evacuated. Last rites were read over him that afternoon. He survived.

President Clinton presents the Medal of Honor to Rascon
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

But despite eyewitness accounts and an immediate recommendation for the Medal of Honor, the paperwork never moved forward. Rascon was awarded the Silver Star, but those who witnessed his actions never forgot what he had done.

Their persistence - over decades - eventually led to a long overdue review and upgrade. On February 8, 2000, thirty-four years after the battle, President Bill Clinton presented him the Medal of Honor.

His citation reads:

> Specialist Four Alfred Rascon, distinguished himself by a series of extraordinarily courageous acts on 16 March 1966, while assigned as a medic to the Reconnaissance Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate). While moving to reinforce its sister battalion under intense enemy attack, the Reconnaissance Platoon came under heavy fire from a numerically superior enemy force. The intense enemy fire from crew-served weapons and grenades severely wounded several point squad soldiers. Specialist Rascon, ignoring directions to stay behind shelter until covering fire could be provided, made his way forward. He repeatedly tried to reach the severely

wounded point machine-gunner laying on an open enemy trail, but was driven back each time by the withering fire. Disregarding his personal safety, he jumped to his feet, ignoring flying bullets and exploding grenades to reach his comrade. To protect him from further wounds, he intentionally placed his body between the soldier and enemy machine guns, sustaining numerous shrapnel injuries and a serious wound to the hip. Disregarding his serious wounds he dragged the larger soldier from the fire-raked trail. Hearing the second machine-gunner yell that he was running out of ammunition, Specialist Rascon, under heavy enemy fire crawled back to the wounded machine-gunner stripping him of his bandoleers of ammunition, giving them to the machine-gunner who continued his suppressive fire. Specialist Rascon fearing the abandoned machine gun, its ammunition and spare barrel could fall into enemy hands made his way to retrieve them. On the way, he was wounded in the face and torso by grenade fragments, but disregarded these wounds to recover the abandoned machine gun, ammunition and spare barrel items, enabling another soldier to provide added suppressive fire to the pinned-down squad. In searching for the wounded, he saw the point grenadier being wounded by small arms fire and grenades being thrown at him. Disregarding his own life and his numerous wounds, Specialist Rascon reached and covered him with his body absorbing the blast from the exploding grenades, and saving the soldier's life, but sustaining additional wounds to his body. While making his way to the wounded point squad leader, grenades were hurled at the sergeant. Again, in complete disregard for his own life, he reached and covered the sergeant with his body, absorbing the full force of the grenade explosions. Once more Specialist Rascon was critically wounded by shrapnel, but disregarded his own wounds to continue to search and aid the wounded. Severely wounded, he remained on the battlefield, inspiring his fellow soldiers to continue the battle. After the enemy broke contact, he disregarded aid for himself, instead treating the wounded and directing their evacuation. Only after being placed on the evacuation helicopter did he allow aid to be given to him. Specialist Rascon's extraordinary valor in the face of deadly enemy fire, his heroism in rescuing the wounded, and his gallantry by repeatedly risking his own life for his fellow soldiers are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Yet the medal did not change him. Rascon’s humility bordered on discomfort. He repeatedly insisted he had not been heroic, that he had simply done his job. To him, the award belonged to the men whose lives he had tried to save and to those who never came home.

After his recovery in 1966, Rascon became a U.S. citizen. He later attended Officer Candidate School, earning his commission in 1970. He returned to Vietnam for a second tour, this time as a

military advisor, and continued his service in the Army Reserve until the mid-1980s. He retired as a Major.

Beyond Service

In his personal life, Rascon built a family with his wife, Carol, and their children. They settled in Maryland, where he balanced public service with a life of quiet reflection. Those who met him often remarked that nothing in his demeanor suggested he carried the nation's highest military honor. He was courteous, soft-spoken, and reluctant to discuss the events of March 16, 1966.

His legacy extends far beyond the medal draped around his neck. The combat medic training center at Fort Campbell now bears his name, ensuring that future generations understand the standard of selfless service he embodied. He is remembered not only as a soldier but as a healer - one who risked everything not in the pursuit of glory, but to save the lives of others.

James M. Sprayberry

Teenage Mother to Farmer

James Michael (Mike) Sprayberry was born on April 24, 1947, in LaGrange, Georgia. As C. Douglas Sterner wrote in one of his Beyond Belief books: "His mother was only fifteen years old at the time and after his birth made the hard decision to have him raised by her aunt in Sylacauga, Alabama, who adopted Mike when he was five years old.

James M. Sprayberry
(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Actually, the farm where Mike grew up was in Coosa County, Alabama, but he noted: "Sylacauga was our home base. It was kind of my stomping ground. Back then, you could go to school in Sylacauga even though we lived in Coosa County and there were no problems."

In his youth Mike spent his summer breaks from school in LaGrange, returning to Sylacauga in the fall for his studies. After elementary school he attended B. B. Comer High School where he played in the band. Of the moves back and forth he later said, "I'm very proud they were able to make that arrangement and never had a cross word to each other. I had the best of both families. It worked out perfectly."

After graduating in 1965, he enrolled in Alexander City Junior College in Alexander City, Alabama. After a year there he noted, "I was bored with school – I was looking for some excitement. I was tired of being a pacifist." In April 1966, he enlisted in the U.S. Army."

Rather than stopping at enlisted service, he went on to complete Officer Candidate School (OCS), earning his commission as a Second Lieutenant. This achievement reflected not only academic and military proficiency but also the perseverance and self-discipline that OCS demanded.

By 1968, Lieutenant Sprayberry was serving with *Company D,* 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, one of the most storied lineages in American military history. As the Vietnam War intensified, the challenges facing young officers multiplied. For Lt. Sprayberry, the defining moment came over April 25–26, 1968.

Near Dau Tieng, in the Republic of Vietnam, his unit became engaged in a brutal confrontation with a well-entrenched enemy force. Heavy fire raked the company, scattering soldiers and pinning down several men who were isolated and gravely wounded. In the chaos and darkness, Sprayberry recognized that a failure to act could cost men their lives and jeopardize the entire company. With

no guarantee of survival and no obligation beyond his moral duty as a leader, he made a decision to move to danger.

Sprayberry led a small rescue force into the thick of enemy fire, advancing through a deadly maze of machine guns, bunkers, and hostile positions. He destroyed multiple enemy emplacements and relentlessly pushed forward despite repeated threats to his own life. His leadership saved numerous wounded soldiers who would have otherwise been lost. The discipline, courage, and clarity of purpose he demonstrated in those critical hours became part of the storied legacy of American valor in Vietnam.

James M. Sprayberry *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

For his actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor on October 7, 1969, by President Richard Nixon.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Sprayberry, Armor, U.S. Army, distinguished himself by exceptional bravery while serving as executive officer of Company D. His company commander and a great number of the men were wounded and separated from the main body of the company. A daylight attempt to rescue them was driven back by the well-entrenched enemy's heavy fire. Capt. Sprayberry then organized and led a volunteer night patrol to eliminate the intervening enemy bunkers and to relieve the surrounded element. The patrol soon began receiving enemy machine-gun fire. Capt. Sprayberry quickly moved the men to protective cover and without regard for his own safety, crawled within close range of the bunker from which the fire was coming. He silenced the machine gun with a hand grenade. Identifying several one-man enemy positions nearby, Capt. Sprayberry immediately attacked them with the rest of his grenades. He crawled back for more grenades and when two grenades were thrown at his men from a position to the front, Capt. Sprayberry, without hesitation, again exposed himself and charged the enemy-held bunker, killing its occupants with a grenade. Placing two men to cover his advance, he crawled forward and neutralized three more bunkers with grenades. Immediately thereafter, Capt. Sprayberry was surprised by an enemy soldier who charged from a concealed position. He killed the soldier with his pistol and with continuing disregard for the danger neutralized another enemy emplacement. Capt. Sprayberry then established radio contact with the isolated men, directing them toward his position. When the two elements made contact he organized his men into litter parties to evacuate the wounded. As the evacuation was nearing completion, he observed an enemy machine-gun position which he silenced with a grenade. Capt.

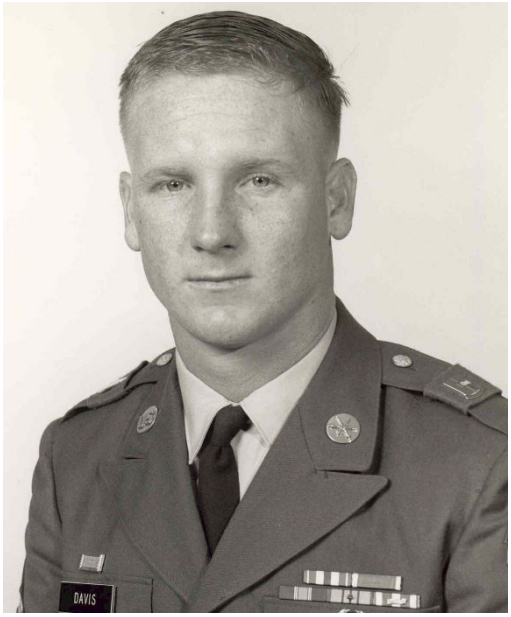
> Sprayberry returned to the rescue party, established security, and moved to friendly lines with the wounded. This rescue operation, which lasted approximately 7 1/2 hours saved the lives of many of his fellow soldiers. Capt. Sprayberry personally killed 12 enemy soldiers, eliminated two machine guns, and destroyed numerous enemy bunkers. Capt. Sprayberry's indomitable spirit and gallant action at great personal risk to his life are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army

Beyond Service:

After the war, he continued his military career, eventually achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before retiring in 1988. Away from the battlefield, Sprayberry built a family life grounded in the same values that carried him through war. He married Nancy Carol Herd who shared his resilience and commitment to service, and together they raised a family on a farm in Alabama. He became a strong advocate for the MIA - missing in action. He made six trips to Vietnam in support of the MIAs.

Sammy Lee Davis

Regular Kid and Real Love



Sammy L. Davis
(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

Sammy Lee Davis entered the world on November 1, 1946, in Dayton, Ohio, born into a family that had long understood the weight and meaning of service. His grandfather had fought in the Spanish-American War, his father Robert Davis served in World War II, and both of his older brothers answered the call to service. In the Davis household, love of country was not an abstraction - it was a lived expectation. As the big brother, Davis was told by his father "Son, don't ever leave your little brother behind."

In his first few years at Manteca High School in California he played football, dove competitively, and spent hours involved in Sea Scouting out of Stockton. After his junior year, the Davis family relocated to Indiana, uprooting him from familiar surroundings and depositing him in the halls of Mooresville High School. Instead of resenting the change, Sammy adapted with characteristic openness, forming new friendships and graduating with the Class of 1966. Davis told author C. Douglas Sterner, "I was just a regular kid. "He enlisted in the U.S. Army shortly after finishing high school, stepping into a legacy that felt both inevitable and deeply personal. He told Veterans Radio in 2009, "I went to Vietnam on my senior trip!"

Basic training hardened him, but it didn't change who he was at his core. Assigned to Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Artillery Regiment of the 9th Infantry Division, Sammy shipped out to Vietnam in March 1967. He was twenty years old - young, spirited, and dedicated to the men beside him.

On the night of November 18, 1967, at Firebase Cudgel near Cai Lây, his courage crystallized into an act that would become legend. His unit came under ferocious attack by an estimated three companies of Viet Cong. Mortars rained down, enemy fire poured in, and chaos swallowed the night. Despite being seriously wounded, Sammy climbed onto a burning howitzer and operated it alone, firing round after round to support his beleaguered comrades.

When he realized there were wounded American soldiers across a river filled with hostile fire, he inflated an air mattress, paddled across - despite a broken back - and pulled the injured men to safety. His actions defied pain, fear, and the instinct for survival. His actions lived the creed to never leave a man behind.

President Lyndon B. Johnson presents Medal of Honor to Sammy L. Davis
(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

For this extraordinary heroism, Sammy L. Davis received the Medal of Honor from President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sgt. Davis (then Pfc.) distinguished himself during the early morning hours while serving as a cannoneer with Battery C, at a remote fire support base. At approximately 0200 hours the fire support base was under heavy enemy mortar attack. Simultaneously, an estimated reinforced Viet Cong battalion launched a fierce ground assault upon the fire support base. The attacking enemy drove to within 25 meters of the friendly positions. Only a river separated the Viet Cong from the fire support base. Detecting a nearby enemy position, Sgt. Davis seized a machine gun and provided covering fire for his gun crew, as they attempted to bring direct artillery fire on the enemy. Despite his efforts, an enemy recoilless-rifle round scored a direct hit upon the artillery piece. The resultant blast hurled the gun crew from their weapon and blew Sgt. Davis into a foxhole. He struggled to his feet and returned to the howitzer, which was burning furiously. Ignoring repeated warnings to seek cover, Sgt. Davis rammed a shell into the gun. Disregarding a withering hail of enemy fire directed against his position, he aimed and fired the howitzer which rolled backward, knocking Sgt. Davis violently to the ground. Undaunted, he returned to the weapon to fire again when an enemy mortar round exploded within 20 meters of his position, injuring him painfully. Nevertheless, Sgt. Davis loaded the artillery piece, aimed, and fired. Again he was knocked down by the recoil. In complete disregard for his safety, Sgt. Davis loaded

> and fired three more shells into the enemy. Disregarding his extensive injuries and his inability to swim, Sgt. Davis picked up an air mattress and struck out across the deep river to rescue three wounded comrades on the far side. Upon reaching the three wounded men, he stood upright and fired into the dense vegetation to prevent the Viet Cong from advancing. While the most seriously wounded soldier was helped across the river, Sgt. Davis protected the two remaining casualties until he could pull them across the river to the fire support base. Though suffering from painful wounds, he refused medical attention, joining another howitzer crew which fired at the large Viet Cong force until it broke contact and fled. Sgt. Davis' extraordinary heroism, at the risk of his life, is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

The years after Vietnam were shaped by physical pain, emotional struggle, and the lingering scars of combat. He continued to serve until injuries forced his retirement in 1984, closing one chapter of his life but opening another.

Davis told author Douglas Sterner in Beyond Belief: True Stories of Maine Corps Heroes: “I went to war and found out about love--what REAL love is. I didn’t go to war to kill people; I went to war because I loved my daddy and wanted him to be proud of me. I went to war because I loved my grandpas and I loved my country. And when I got over there (Vietnam), the reason we fought so hard was because we discovered that we loved each other. We were all we had, and we became brothers. There, in Vietnam, I learned about what REAL love is.”

Beyond Service

In his post-military years, Sammy found companionship and strength in his wife, Dixie Marie Taylor. Together, they transformed his experiences - both harrowing and inspirational - into a mission of education and healing. They traveled the country speaking to schools, veterans, civic groups, and communities about resilience, honor, and the cost of freedom. Dixie offered insights into the challenges of loving and supporting a veteran, while Sammy shared lessons forged in the crucible of war.

Sammy’s story entered American culture in unexpected ways. His Medal of Honor ceremony footage was later used, with alterations, in the film *Forrest Gump*, symbolically linking his real-life heroism to the fictional character’s journey. Yet fame has never defined him. What defines Sammy L. Davis is the way he has chosen to live - with humility, service, and a lifelong devotion to lifting others up.

Sammy Davis, 2009
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Don J. Jenkins

A Private Man from Rural Kentucky

On April 18, 1948, in the small rural settlement of Quality, Kentucky, Don J. Jenkins was born. Public records say little about Don's early childhood. Rural Kentucky in the late 1940s and 1950s raised children to be self-reliant before they were grown and responsible before they knew any other way to be. Farm chores were done at dawn, school came after, and the evenings belonged to whatever remained unfinished from the day. The people of Butler County often say the land itself teaches you persistence.

Don J. Jenkins
(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)

What we do know is that somewhere between those rural fields and the threshold of adulthood, Don Jenkins formed a sense of duty strong enough to carry him into the U.S. Army. He enlisted from Nashville, Tennessee. By early 1969, he was serving as a Private First Class in Company A, 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, deployed to the harsh and unforgiving battlegrounds of Vietnam. In the tropical heat and the thick vegetation of Kien Phong Province, Jenkins found himself far from the temperate hills of Kentucky.

On January 6, 1969, Don Jenkins faced the moment that would define him in the eyes of the nation. Under a barrage of gunfire, Jenkins repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire, running across open ground to resupply ammunition and shifting between weapons to maintain a defensive front. He attacked enemy bunkers, provided covering fire to pinned-down soldiers, and continued to fight even after he himself was wounded. His courage allowed his fellow soldiers to survive an engagement that could have ended in devastating loss.

For this extraordinary gallantry, he would receive the Medal of Honor, presented by President Richard Nixon on March 2, 1971, in the East Room of the White House.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. S/Sgt. Jenkins (then Pfc.), Company A, distinguished himself while serving as a machine gunner on a reconnaissance mission. When his company came under heavy crossfire from an enemy complex, S/Sgt. Jenkins unhesitatingly maneuvered forward to a perilously exposed position and began placing suppressive fire on the enemy. When his own machine gun jammed, he immediately obtained a rifle and continued to fire into the enemy bunkers until his machine gun was made operative by his assistant. He exposed himself to extremely heavy fire when he repeatedly both ran and crawled across open terrain to obtain

resupplies of ammunition until he had exhausted all that was available for his machine gun. Displaying tremendous presence of mind, he then armed himself with two antitank weapons and, by himself, maneuvered through the hostile fusillade to within 20 meters of an enemy bunker to destroy that position. After moving back to the friendly defensive perimeter long enough to secure yet another weapon, a grenade launcher, S/Sgt. Jenkins moved forward to a position providing no protection and resumed placing accurate fire on the enemy until his ammunition was again exhausted. During this time, he was seriously wounded by shrapnel. Undaunted and displaying great courage, he moved forward 100 meters to aid a friendly element that was pinned down only a few meters from the enemy. This he did with complete disregard for his own wound and despite having been advised that several previous rescue attempts had failed at the cost of the life of one and wounding of others. Ignoring the continuing intense fire and his painful wounds, and hindered by darkness, he made three trips to the beleaguered unit, each time pulling a wounded comrade back to safety. S/Sgt. Jenkins' extraordinary valor, dedication, and indomitable spirit inspired his fellow soldiers to repulse the determined enemy attack and ultimately to defeat the larger force. S/Sgt. Jenkins' risk of his life reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

Like many who performed extraordinary acts, Jenkins did not seek the spotlight that came afterward. He continued his service, eventually rising to the rank of Staff Sergeant, and later returned to civilian life with a quiet dignity. The details of his family life, career, or personal pursuits after the war remain largely unwritten in public records - a testament to how steadfastly he guarded his privacy. Some people live loudly, broadcasting their deeds; others, like Jenkins, simply carry on, letting their actions speak on their behalf.

Robert M. Patterson

Tobacco Farm High School Drop Out to the White House

Army Sgt. Robert M. Patterson, Medal of Honor recipient
(Credit: Army)

Robert Martin Patterson had an improbable start to life on April 16, 1948, in Durham, North Carolina. The dirt that shaped him belonged to the farms outside Fayetteville. His childhood was carved into the red Carolina soil. The Patterson family lived modestly, raising tobacco, scraping by with what they could grow, make, or mend. Robert was one of six children. As long as he could remember, there was always something to be done: rows to be tended, barns to be swept, animals to be fed.

He often joked, later in life, that he learned discipline behind a mule, not by a drill sergeant. The family couldn't afford a tractor, so he plowed by walking behind the animal in straight, unforgiving lines. The pace was slow and the work exhausting. Responsibility wasn't abstract; it was the earth in his hands and the expectations of farm life which didn't allow much time for childhood leisure.

Patterson attended high school in the Fayetteville area, but classrooms could never compete with the world he already knew. He wasn't rebellious or troubled, simply restless. Living so close to Fort Bragg, he watched streams of airborne soldiers moving through town. The paratroopers were hard, confident, capable - everything he longed to be. By his senior year, the decision had already crystallized inside him. The war was calling, and so was the chance to escape a life of grinding poverty.

So, he dropped out. In 1966, still shy of adulthood, Patterson enlisted in the U.S. Army. His father didn't protest; farm life had instilled a belief that each child must choose their own direction. After completing basic training, he earned his place in the 82nd Airborne Division. Jump school taught him how to fall, how to rise, and how to trust the men around him with his life. The discipline came naturally. Hard work he understood.

By late 1967, he was transferred to Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry of the 101st Airborne Division and sent to Vietnam. He arrived in country under fire - literally. Mortars fell on the airfield as he stepped off the plane, the air thick with the shock of reality.

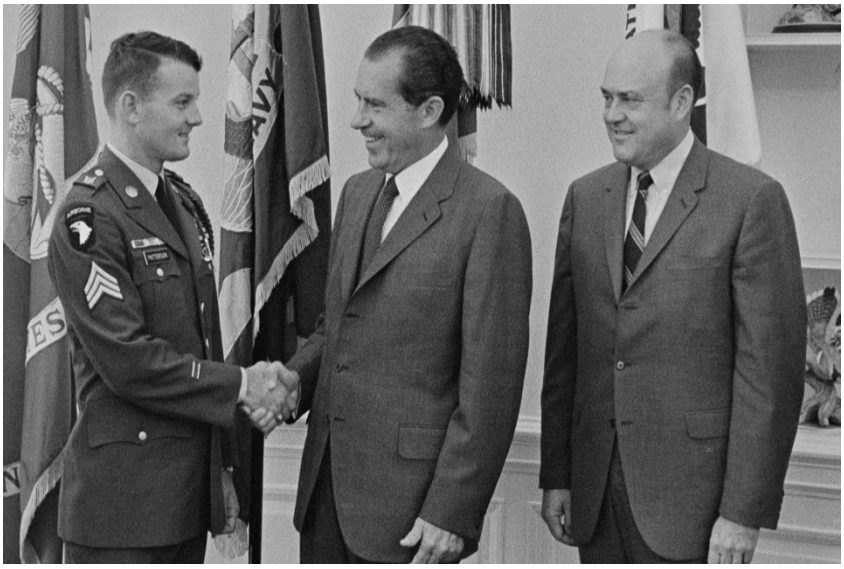
On May 6, 1968, near the small hamlet of La Chu, his platoon was pinned down by a row of fortified enemy bunkers. Men he respected were dying or wounded. The line was breaking. Patterson didn't pause. He gathered his fire team of two and charged forward through gunfire that should have stopped any reasonable man. He destroyed one bunker, then another, and then - alone

- he stormed three more. By the time he was done, at least eight enemy soldiers lay dead and the position had collapsed under his assault. His platoon surged forward because he had gone first. At twenty years old, he would receive the Medal of Honor for that day.

President Richard Nixom presented the Medal on October 9, 1969.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sgt. Patterson (then Sp4c.) distinguished himself while serving as a fire team leader of the 3d Platoon, Troop B, during an assault against a North Vietnamese Army battalion which was entrenched in a heavily fortified position. When the leading squad of the 3d Platoon was pinned down by heavy interlocking automatic-weapons and rocket-propelled-grenade fire from two enemy bunkers, Sgt. Patterson and the two other members of his assault team moved forward under a hail of enemy fire to destroy the bunkers with grenade and machine-gun fire. Observing that his comrades were being fired on from a third enemy bunker covered by enemy gunners in one-man spider holes, Sgt. Patterson, with complete disregard for his safety and ignoring the warnings of his comrades that he was moving into a bunker complex, assaulted and destroyed the position. Although exposed to intensive small-arms and grenade fire from the bunkers and their mutually supporting emplacements, Sgt. Patterson continued his assault upon the bunkers which were impeding the advance of his unit. Sgt. Patterson singlehandedly destroyed by rifle and grenade fire five enemy bunkers, killed eight enemy soldiers, and captured seven weapons. His dauntless courage and heroism inspired his platoon to resume the attack and to penetrate the enemy defensive position. Sgt. Patterson's action at the risk of his life has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.



Army Sgt. Robert M. Patterson shakes hands with President Richard M. Nixon during a White House Medal of Honor ceremony, Oct. 9, 1969
Credit: *Richard Nixon Presidential Library* ***VIRIN:*** *691009-O-D0439-021Y*

But Patterson's story didn't end in Vietnam. He stayed in the Army, rising to the rank of Command Sergeant Major and serving until 1991.

Beyond Service

His personal life included marriages, children, and eventually a quiet life in Florida, far from the jungles of Vietnam but never far from the memory of those who did not return.

In retirement, he chose service again - this time as a veterans' benefits counselor with the Department of Veterans Affairs. He used the credibility of his own sacrifices to steady others, helping those who carried burdens heavier than their uniforms.

Heart surgery eventually slowed him, but never stopped him. To this day, Patterson speaks to students and soldiers alike, wearing the Medal not as a symbol of glory but as an obligation. He often says he is merely its keeper, not its owner. The real owners, he insists, are the men still resting beneath foreign soil.

Gary G. Wetzel

Family of Nine and Equipment Operator

United States Army Specialist Fourth Class Gary George Wetzel received the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Vietnam War *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Gary George Wetzel was born on September 29, 1947, in the close-knit community of South Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The second oldest in a bustling household of nine children, Wetzel's early years were shaped by the noise and constant motion that accompany a large family. His father, a quiet but steady World War II veteran, provided an example of service and sacrifice that Gary would come to understand far more deeply than he ever expected. His mother balanced the demands of raising nine children with part-time work as a nursing assistant.

Growing up, Wetzel was happiest outdoors. He took to the Boy Scouts with enthusiasm, learning lifelong skills of teamwork, resilience, and self-reliance. Sports were another outlet - baseball, football, anything that required strength and grit drew him in. He was not, by his own later descriptions, a particularly studious child. He was in the habit of skipping a lot of school as school was not really his thing.

Movies, however, did capture his imagination - particularly the classic Westerns of John Wayne. The actor's onscreen code of loyalty and courage left an impression on young Gary.

At eighteen, shortly after leaving Oak Creek High School, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. Training brought him first to Fort Knox and later to Fort Leonard Wood, where he served as a heavy equipment instructor. Still, he sought something more. Wetzel put in multiple requests to deploy to Vietnam, determined to serve where he felt he was needed most.

He arrived in Vietnam in 1966 as part of an ordnance unit delivering ammunition, but monotony was not something he tolerated well. Before long he volunteered for aviation duty, joining the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company as a door gunner. The job demanded alertness, courage, and the willingness to face danger every time the aircraft lifted off the ground. Wetzel took to it instinctively. Those who served alongside him described him as steady, loyal, and unflinching under fire.

Everything in his life seemed to lead to January 8, 1968. On that day, near the village of Ap Dong An, Wetzel's helicopter came under devastating enemy fire. Rocket-propelled grenades tore into the aircraft, throwing Wetzel from his gun position and shredding his arms, chest, and leg. His left

arm was nearly severed. Bleeding severely and drifting in and out of consciousness, he could have stayed down.

Wetzel pulled himself back to his feet, crawled to his weapon mount, and resumed firing. His was the only suppressive fire keeping the enemy at bay. Even as his strength ebbed, he attempted to aid his wounded crew members. His actions saved lives - actions taken at a cost he continues to carry. His wounds later required the amputation of his left arm and months of recovery.

For his extraordinary heroism and self-sacrifice, Wetzel received the Medal of Honor, presented by President Lyndon B. Johnson on November 19, 1968.

His citation reads:

> Sp4c. Wetzel, 173d Assault Helicopter Company, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sp4c. Wetzel was serving as door gunner aboard a helicopter which was part of an insertion force trapped in a landing zone by intense and deadly hostile fire. Sp4c. Wetzel was going to the aid of his aircraft commander when he was blown into a rice paddy and critically wounded by two enemy rockets that exploded just inches from his location. Although bleeding profusely due to the loss of his left arm and severe wounds in his right arm, chest, and left leg, Sp4c. Wetzel staggered back to his original position in his gun-well and took the enemy forces under fire. His machine gun was the only weapon placing effective fire on the enemy at that time. Through a resolve that overcame the shock and intolerable pain of his injuries, Sp4c. Wetzel remained at his position until he had eliminated the automatic-weapons emplacement that had been inflicting heavy casualties on the American troops and preventing them from moving against this strong enemy force. Refusing to attend to his own extensive wounds, he attempted to return to the aid of his aircraft commander but passed out from loss of blood. Regaining consciousness, he persisted in his efforts to drag himself to the aid of his fellow crewman. After an agonizing effort, he came to the side of the crew chief who was attempting to drag the wounded aircraft commander to the safety of a nearby dike. Unswerving in his devotion to his fellow man, Sp4c. Wetzel assisted his crew chief even though he lost consciousness once again during this action. Sp4c. Wetzel displayed extraordinary heroism in his efforts to aid his fellow crewmen. His gallant actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Beyond Service

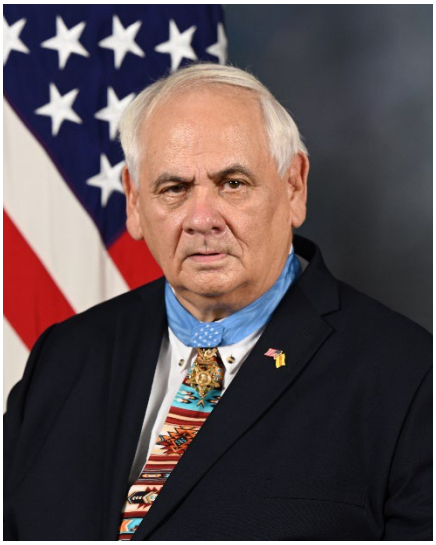
After his medical retirement, he returned home to Wisconsin as both a young man forever changed and a national hero. He went to work as a heavy equipment operator until he retired.

He married his fiancée, Kathy, and together they built a family. He became a voice for veterans, visiting schools, mentoring young people, and advocating for those facing limb loss or disability. His community honored him, naming trails and streets for him and celebrating "Gary G. Wetzel Day" in 2017.

Despite later hardships - including a serious motorcycle crash - Wetzel remained unbowed. He has said, "I'm a survivor, not a winner. We received these medals - we didn't win them. I am not a hero. I am afraid to die. But I didn't want to die in the slop, among leeches in a rice paddy. The whole idea is surviving."

Dwight W. Birdwell

Native American, Warrior & Lawyer



Dwight W. Birdwell
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Dwight Wayne Birdwell was born on a cold January morning in 1948 in Amarillo, Texas, but his true roots stretched deep into the red earth of eastern Oklahoma. He grew up in Bell, a small Cherokee community tucked among rolling hills, where family, tradition, and hard work shaped a boy long before the U.S. Army. Life in Bell was simple, even austere - fields to tend, chores to complete, elders to respect. Dwight often joked later in life that receiving the Medal of Honor was "a long way from the strawberry patch where I grew up," but the truth was that patch had given him the grit to survive.

As a child, Dwight attended Bell Grade School, a small facility where everyone knew everyone else and where Native heritage was woven quietly into lessons and daily life. He learned discipline first through family expectations and later through the expectations of teachers who saw something steady, reliable, and serious in him. That quiet steadiness carried him to Stilwell High School, where he graduated in 1966.

That same year, at eighteen, Dwight enlisted in the U.S. Army. The transition from rural Oklahoma to military life was stark, but Birdwell was, by upbringing and temperament, well suited to structure. The Army quickly recognized his capability, assigning him to the 25th Infantry Division, Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment. He became a specialist in armored cavalry operations, working with tanks and armored personnel carriers - machines that demanded calm precision, the kind he possessed in abundance.

In 1967, Birdwell set foot in Vietnam. His defining moment came on January 31, 1968, the opening day of the Tet Offensive. Birdwell's unit rushed toward Tan Son Nhut Air Base as it came under massive assault. Chaos met them immediately - smoke drifting across the field, gunfire raking through vehicles, soldiers scrambling for cover. When his tank commander was wounded, Birdwell climbed into the commander's position without hesitation. Exposed to relentless fire, he worked the .50-caliber machine gun and the tank's 90-mm cannon, pushing back against waves of enemy forces.

Even after being wounded, he refused evacuation. At one point he leapt from the tank, crossed open ground under fire, salvaged machine guns and ammunition from a downed helicopter, and returned to the fight. His actions that day saved lives and helped prevent the fall of the air base.

Months later, on July 4, 1968, he again risked his life to rescue wounded comrades during another intense engagement. For these acts he would eventually receive two Silver Stars, two Purple Hearts, and after an exhaustive review of awards to minority service members - decades later - the Medal of Honor.

His Medal was awarded by President Joe Biden in July 2022 after review and upgrade of medals of minority service members.

His citation reads:

> Specialist Five Dwight W. Birdwell distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with C Troop, 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division in the Republic of Vietnam on 31 January 1968. On this date, C Troop was ordered to move south to help repel an enemy attack on Tan Son Nhut Airbase. As the C Troop column of tanks and armored personnel carriers approached the west gate of Tan Son Nhut Airbase, it came under intense enemy fire from a building to its right. Unbeknown to C Troop, it had driven directly into an enemy force consisting of three battalions. The column tried to push through the initial attack but the lead tank, crippled by a rocket-propelled grenade explosion, was blocking the way forward. C Troop immediately came under heavy enemy fire from both sides of the road. Specialist Five Birdwell, upon seeing that his tank commander was wounded by enemy fire, immediately went to his aid. Under intense enemy fire, he lowered the injured tank commander to the ground, and moved him to safety. Specialist Five Birdwell then, with complete disregard for his own safety, mounted the tank and assumed the tank commander's position. Standing in the tank commander's hatch with the upper half of his body exposed to heavy enemy fire, Specialist Five Birdwell used the tank's .50 caliber machine gun and 90mm main gun to suppress the enemy attack. With the ammunition for the 90mm main gun exhausted, he continued to fire the .50 caliber machine gun until it overheated. At this point, Specialist Five Birdwell, rather than abandoning his position, continued to engage the enemy with his M-16 rifle, sometimes exposing his entire body to enemy fire in order to engage the enemy from a better vantage point. When a U.S. helicopter crashed nearby, Specialist Five Birdwell, under withering enemy fire, dismounted and moved to the helicopter where he retrieved two M-60 machine guns and ammunition. After giving one M-60 and ammunition to a fellow soldier, he remounted his tank and used the other M-60 to again engage the enemy. Specialist Five Birdwell continued to engage the enemy with complete disregard for his own safety until the M-60 he was firing was hit by enemy fire. Specialist Five Birdwell, now wounded in the face, neck, chest, and arms, dismounted the tank but refused to be medically evacuated. Instead, Specialist Five Birdwell, under enemy fire, rallied fellow soldiers to advance toward the front of the armored column where they set up a defensive position by a large tree. From this position, he and the other soldiers engaged the enemy with M-16 fire and grenades. As the enemy fire lessened, Specialist Five Birdwell gathered ammunition from disabled vehicles and helped wounded soldiers move to safer positions. His leadership and tenacity under fire

> inspired the other C Troop soldiers to continue fighting against the superior enemy force, and directly contributed to the enemy's ultimate defeat. Specialist Five Birdwell's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

When Birdwell returned home in December 1968, he carried not only scars but a sharpened sense of purpose. He knew education was the path forward. He entered Northeastern State University, earning his degree in 1972, and then attended the University of Oklahoma College of Law. Hard work paid off - he graduated near the top of his class in 1976.

Life steadied. He married his wife Virginia, raising two children, Stephanie and Edward, and eventually becoming a grandfather.

In civilian life, Birdwell built a respected legal career in Oklahoma City, focusing on energy, natural-resources law, and Native American legal issues. His Cherokee heritage remained central to who he is, and in 1987 he accepted a role on the Cherokee Nation’s Judicial Appeals Tribunal - the tribe’s highest court. He served until 1999, including two terms as Chief Justice.

His service extended to writing as well; he co-authored *A Hundred Miles of Bad Road*, a memoir of armored cavalry combat in Vietnam. Yet even with professional success, honors, and the recognition that came decades after his battlefield heroism, Birdwell never distanced himself from where he started.

From a strawberry patch to the halls of justice, from a rural Cherokee schoolhouse to the Medal of Honor, Dwight W. Birdwell’s life has been a testament to courage born from small beginnings - and to the extraordinary acts ordinary people can achieve when their character is forged long before the battle begins.

Gary M. Rose

Quiet Boy to Special Forces Medic

Gary M. Rose *(via Wikimedia Commons, US Army photographer - army.mil, Public domain)*

Gary Michael Rose was born to a WWII Marine on October 17, 1947, in Watertown, New York, He grew up in southern California, where his formative years would unfold amid the sun-bleached neighborhoods of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley. His upbringing was modest, built on discipline, respect, and a quiet sense of responsibility instilled by a father whose own wartime experiences were never far away.

Rose attended James Monroe High School in Sepulveda - now North Hills - California. He graduated in 1965, an unassuming senior. Little is recorded about his high-school activities, an indication of the low-profile attitude he carried throughout his life. Instead, his classmates would later say he was quiet, steady, and reliable.

After graduation, the war in Vietnam escalated, and in April 1967, Rose enlisted in the U.S. Army. He approached the decision with a sense of duty rather than adventure, believing that if others were being sent to fight, he had an obligation to stand alongside them. The Army quickly recognized his aptitude: after basic training at Fort Ord and advanced infantry training at Fort Gordon, he qualified for Airborne School at Fort Benning. His intelligence scores and steadiness marked him for something more demanding, and in October 1967 he entered the rigorous pipeline of Special Forces training at Fort Bragg. Nearly a year later, he emerged as a Special Forces medic - one of the most demanding roles in the Special Operations community.

By 1970, with the war intensifying, Rose requested reassignment to South Vietnam. He was placed into one of the most secretive units of the conflict: the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), a covert special operations command that conducted deep reconnaissance and interdiction missions into Laos and Cambodia.

In September 1970, during Operation Tailwind, Rose's skills and resolve were pushed to their limits. Deep in Laos, surrounded and vastly outnumbered, he spent four relentless days treating between sixty and seventy wounded comrades under constant fire. He crawled through enemy barrages to reach the injured, shielding them with his own body, refusing evacuation even when he was hit by shrapnel and gunfire. On the day of extraction, when their helicopter was shot down, Rose again pulled survivors from burning wreckage. His actions saved countless lives and exemplified the Special Forces creed in its purest form. For decades, the mission was classified, and only a Distinguished Service Cross was awarded. Not until 2017 - nearly half a century later - did Rose receive the Medal of Honor, an upgrade he had so fully earned.

Rose being helped from a helicopter after Operation Tailwind, 14 May 1970 *(via Wikimedia Commons, US Army personnel - army.mil Photo courtesy of Ted Wicorek, Public domain)*

President Donald J. Trump presented the medal to him on October 23, 2017.

His citation reads:

> Sergeant Gary Michael Rose distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Special Forces Medic with a company sized exploitation force, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces. Between 11 and 14 September 1970, Sergeant Rose's company was continuously engaged by a well-armed and numerically superior hostile force deep in enemy-controlled territory. Enemy B-40 rockets and mortar rounds rained down while the adversary sprayed the area with small arms and machine gun fire, wounding many and forcing everyone to seek cover. Sergeant

> Rose, braving the hail of bullets, sprinted fifty meters to a wounded soldier's side. He then used his own body to protect the casualty from further injury while treating his wounds. After stabilizing the casualty, Sergeant Rose carried him through the bullet-ridden combat zone to protective cover. As the enemy accelerated the attack, Sergeant Rose continuously exposed himself to intense fire as he fearlessly moved from casualty to casualty, administering life-saving aid. A B-40 rocket impacted just meters from Sergeant Rose, knocking him from his feet and injuring his head, hand, and foot. Ignoring his wounds, Sergeant Rose struggled to his feet and continued to render aid to the other injured soldiers. During an attempted medevac, Sergeant Rose again exposed himself to enemy fire as he attempted to hoist wounded personnel up to the hovering helicopter, which was unable to land due to unsuitable terrain. The medevac mission was aborted due to intense enemy fire and the helicopter crashed a few miles away due to the enemy fire sustained during the attempted extraction. Over the next two days, Sergeant Rose continued to expose himself to enemy fire in order to treat the wounded, estimated to be half of the company's personnel. On September 14, during the company's eventual helicopter extraction, the enemy launched a full-scale offensive. Sergeant Rose, after loading wounded personnel on the first set of extraction helicopters, returned to the outer perimeter under enemy fire, carrying friendly casualties and moving wounded personnel to more secure positions until they could be evacuated. He then returned to the perimeter to help repel the enemy until the final extraction helicopter arrived. As the final helicopter was loaded, the enemy began to overrun the company's position, and the helicopter's Marine door gunner was shot in the neck. Sergeant Rose instantly administered critical medical treatment onboard the helicopter, saving the Marine's life. The helicopter carrying Sergeant Rose crashed several hundred meters from the evacuation point, further injuring Sergeant Rose and the personnel on board. Despite his numerous wounds from the past three days, Sergeant Rose continued to pull and carry unconscious and wounded personnel out of the burning wreckage and continued to administer aid to the wounded until another extraction helicopter arrived. Sergeant Rose's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty were critical to saving numerous lives over that four-day time period. His actions are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Special Forces, and the United States Army.

After Vietnam, Rose remained in the Army, attending Officer Candidate School and commissioning as a second lieutenant in field artillery in 1973. His later career took him across Panama, Germany, South Korea, and numerous stateside assignments before he retired as a Captain in 1987. Along the way, he pursued education with the same determination he once applied to battlefield medicine, earning a bachelor's degree from Cameron University in 1977 and later a master's degree in communication from the University of Oklahoma.

Beyond Service

Throughout this journey, Rose was grounded by his family. He married his wife, Margaret, in 1971, and together they raised three children. His devotion to them mirrored the loyalty he had

shown to his teammates in Vietnam - quiet, steadfast, and unwavering. After leaving the Army, he embarked on a civilian career writing technical manuals and training programs for the manufacturing industry, including years with Raytheon. In 2005, he settled in Huntsville, Alabama, drawn there by a fellow veteran and longtime friend.

In retirement, Rose continued to serve, offering time and support to veteran organizations, charitable groups, and the Knights of Columbus. Despite the national attention that followed his Medal of Honor award, he remained the same unassuming man he had always been: humble, sincere, and deeply aware that courage, in its truest sense, belongs to those who act not for glory but for others.

Michael E. Thornton

Never Left a Man Behind

Michael E. Thornton *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Michael Edwin Thornton entered the world on March 23, 1949, in Greenville, South Carolina, but it was the family farm near Spartanburg that shaped him. The rhythms of rural life - waking before dawn, tending fields, fixing what was broken, and working until the job was done - formed the backbone of his character. Here, endurance was survival. Responsibility was not a lesson; it was a way of life. In that world, young Mike learned that a person's word mattered, that loyalty ran deep, and that strength was less about muscle and more about perseverance.

School provided structure, but it was outside the classroom that Thornton matured. By the time he reached Torrance High School, he had both the physical sturdiness and the restless energy that would later define his military career. Graduation came in 1967 and the Navy beckoned.

He enlisted almost immediately after finishing high school, beginning a journey that would take him far beyond the quiet Southern farmland of his youth. Basic training at San Diego revealed a young man whose limits were far higher than anyone expected - including himself. When he volunteered for SEAL training, he was not seeking glory. He sought challenge, discipline, brotherhood. BUD/S delivered all three, with a brutality reserved for only the toughest candidates. Out of his original class of 129 men, just twelve graduated including Thornton in 1969.

The war in Vietnam was raging when he earned his Trident, and it was there, in the jungles and river deltas, that Mike Thornton found both the best and worst of humanity. Assigned to SEAL Team One, he operated with U.S. and South Vietnamese commandos on deep-reconnaissance and direct-action missions - operations so dangerous that even survival was a measure of success.

On October 31, 1972, Thornton faced the moment that would define his life. Operating near the Cửa Việt River, his small team infiltrated enemy territory on an intelligence-gathering mission. The men were soon overwhelmed by a much larger North Vietnamese force. With gunfire snapping through the air and artillery landing dangerously close, Thornton's team attempted to withdraw. Amid the chaos came devastating news: Lieutenant Thomas R. Norris - his friend, mentor, and team leader - had been struck in the head and left for dead.

But Mike Thornton refused to accept it. Under heavy fire, he ran back toward the point where Norris had fallen, his mind focused only on one thought: no man gets left behind. Miraculously,

Norris was still alive. Thornton hoisted him over his shoulders, fought their way toward the shoreline, and then began the long, brutal swim to safety - two hours in dark water. It was a feat of strength, loyalty, and raw determination. He became a Seal legend for not leaving his Lieutenant and friend behind. For his actions that night, Thornton received the Medal of Honor.

President Richard Nixom presented the medal on October 15, 1973.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while participating in a daring operation against enemy forces. PO Thornton, as assistant U.S. Navy adviser, along with a U.S. Navy lieutenant serving as senior adviser, accompanied a three-man Vietnamese Navy SEAL patrol on an intelligence-gathering and prisoner capture operation against an enemy-occupied naval river base. Launched from a Vietnamese Navy junk in a rubber boat, the patrol reached land and was continuing on foot toward its objective when it suddenly came under heavy fire from a numerically superior force. The patrol called in naval gunfire support and then engaged the enemy in a fierce firefight, accounting for many enemy casualties before moving back to the waterline to prevent encirclement. Upon learning that the senior adviser had been hit by enemy fire and was believed to be dead, PO Thornton returned through a hail of fire to the lieutenant's last position, quickly disposed of two enemy soldiers about to overrun the position, and succeeded in removing the seriously wounded and unconscious Senior Naval Advisor to the water's edge. He then inflated the lieutenant's lifejacket and towed him seaward for approximately two hours until picked up by support craft. By his extraordinary courage and perseverance, PO Thornton was directly responsible for saving the life of his superior officer and enabling the safe extraction of all patrol members, thereby upholding the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Almost three years later, Lt. Tommy Norris received the Medal of Honor from President Gerald Ford. As author Dwight Zimmerman wrote "For the second time in the Medal's history, one Medal of Honor recipient had saved the life of another serviceman honored with the nation's highest decoration for valor." They wrote about their own story in the 2016 book *"By Honor Bound: Two Navy SEALS, the Medal of Honor, and a Story of Extraordinary Courage."*

Thornton's service, however, did not end with the award. He returned home, taught the next generations of SEALs as a BUD/S instructor, and later served with the British Special Boat Squadron. In 1980, he was hand-selected to become a founding member of SEAL Team SIX, the Navy's pioneering counter-terrorism unit. A decade later, he continued to lead and advise during periods of rising global tension, including support roles connected to Operation Desert Storm. He received an officer commission in 1982. In 1992, after twenty-five years of service, Mike Thornton retired as a Navy lieutenant.

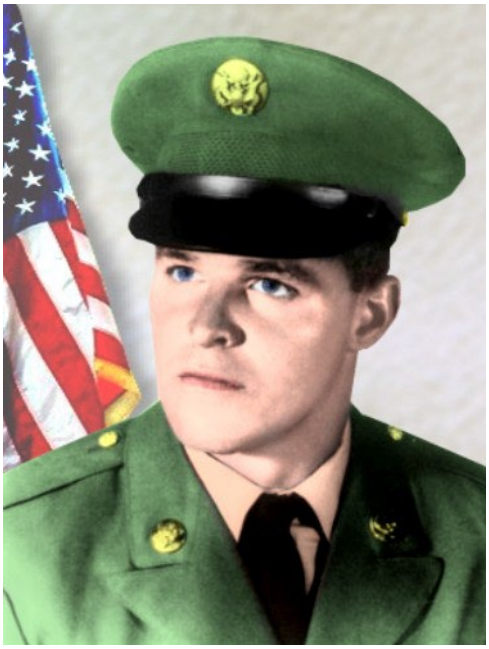
Beyond Service

Life after the uniform did not slow him. Thornton became a mentor, speaker, and advocate for veterans across the country. He lent his voice to leadership programs, educational initiatives, and organizations dedicated to honoring military service.

Yet at his core, Thornton has always been the man shaped by the quiet fields of South Carolina: loyal, unassuming, guided by principle. His heroism did not arise in a moment; it evolved through a lifetime of doing what was right, even when the world demanded what was easy. His story is of a man bound by honor long before the medal was ever placed around his neck.

John P. Baca

Troubled Youth to Covering a Grenade



John Baca
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

John Philip Baca began on January 10, 1949, in Providence, Rhode Island, he was the son of a working-class family trying to make its way in a rapidly changing America. His early childhood was unremarkable, but his life soon shifted westward. After his mother remarried, the family - John and his two sisters, Kathy and Judy - moved first to Stockton, California, and later settled in San Diego.

But in those teenage years, he just drifted at Kearny High School graduating in 1967. He was drawn more toward the streets than to textbooks. Truancy, trouble, and occasional trips to juvenile hall punctuated his adolescence. He later joked that the draft probably saved him - that the Army did more to straighten him out than any parent, teacher, or judge ever managed.

He entered the Army in June 1968 and Vietnam was his future. Baca joined Company D, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, part of the famed 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). The Army, with its structure and sense of purpose, had a steadying effect on him. He grew close to the young men who shared the mud, monsoon rains, and fear with him - brothers forged in a place where survival depended on trust.

It was during a night ambush mission on February 10, 1970, in Phuoc Long Province, that Baca performed the act that would define his military career and change the course of eight other lives.

When an enemy grenade landed near his platoon, time slowed. Baca tore off his steel helmet, covered the grenade with it, then pressed his body down on top. The explosion tore through him, but the helmet and his own form absorbed its deadly force. He woke much later in a hospital, wounded but alive, and more importantly - so were his men. It took nearly a year before he recovered enough to be discharged.

On June 15, 1971, President Richard Nixon presented him the Medal of Honor.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sp4c. Baca, Company D, distinguished himself while serving on a recoilless-rifle team during a night ambush mission. A platoon from his company was sent to investigate the detonation of an automatic ambush device forward of his unit's main position and soon came under intense enemy fire from concealed positions along the trail. Hearing the heavy firing from the platoon position and realizing that his recoilless-rifle team could assist the members of the besieged patrol, Sp4c. Baca led his team through the hail of enemy fire to a firing position within the patrol's defensive perimeter. As they prepared to engage the enemy, a fragmentation grenade was thrown into the midst of the patrol. Fully aware of the danger to his comrades, Sp4c. Baca unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own safety, covered the grenade with his steel helmet and fell on it as the grenade exploded, thereby absorbing the lethal fragments and concussion with his body. His gallant action and total disregard for his personal well-being directly saved eight men from certain serious injury or death. The extraordinary courage and selflessness displayed by Sp4c. Baca, at the risk of his life, are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

But Baca never embraced the celebrity that sometimes follows recipients of that decoration. He chose a different path - but rooted in service.

Beyond Service

After the Army, Baca worked as a veterans-benefits counselor in Los Angeles, trying to help other veterans navigate paperwork, trauma, and the long shadow of the war. He also took classes at Southern California College in Costa Mesa.

As the years passed, Baca gravitated toward causes that centered on healing and remembrance. He wrote letters - hundreds of them - to Gold Star families, wounded veterans, and sometimes to people who simply needed encouragement. He baked apple pies and mailed them overseas to deployed servicemembers or brought them to gatherings in his community of Julian, the mountain town east of San Diego where he eventually settled. He lived simply: no television, no computer, just a small home filled with handwritten notes and binders of thank-you cards from people whose lives he had touched.

Perhaps the most profound chapter of his postwar life unfolded in 1990, when he returned to Vietnam with the Veterans Vietnam Restoration Project. For eight weeks he worked alongside former North Vietnamese Army soldiers - men who had once been his enemies - building the Vietnamese-American Friendship Clinic. During that trip, he encountered, by extraordinary

coincidence, a former NVA soldier he had captured decades earlier on Christmas Day, 1969. Their reunion, once unthinkable, was marked not by bitterness but by shared labor and quiet understanding.

Communities eventually recognized what Baca never trumpeted. In 2002, Huntington Beach dedicated John Baca Park in his honor. San Diego followed, renaming a Linda Vista park for him and installing a monument.

From troubled youth to reluctant hero, from the jungles of Vietnam to the quiet streets of Julian, John Philip Baca's life has been defined not by the moment he threw himself on a grenade, but by the decades he spent afterward throwing himself into the lives of others. His story is not just one of bravery, but of transformation, humility, and the enduring power of compassion.

Dennis M. Fujii

Hawaiian Hero with the Aloha Spirit

Dennis M. Fujii *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Dennis Marc Fujii was born on March 1, 1949, in the small plantation town of Hanapēpē, on the island of Kauaʻi. The rhythm of island life shaped him early - days spent in the mountains hunting with friends, afternoons shooting hoops or playing football at school, and evenings surrounded by the laughter of his large Japanese-American family. He was one of six children, a middle son in a working-class household where discipline was taught more by example than lecture. His father had served in the Hawaiʻi National Guard, and Dennis admired the quiet pride with which he wore that service.

In high school, Fujii was not loud or attention-seeking. Teachers remembered him as soft-spoken, respectful, but competitive on the basketball court and football field. Yet by his senior year, the world felt heavier. The Vietnam War was on the news every night, and though many his age avoided the draft, Fujii made a different choice. In 1967, before he even completed high school, he enlisted in the US Army. He would finish his diploma while serving - something that surprised no one who knew his persistence.

His first tour in Vietnam came in 1968, when he was assigned as an assistant machine-gunner with the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. After nine months in the field, he could have left the Army behind. Instead, he volunteered for medevac duty. The crews of unarmed Huey helicopters - known as Dustoff crews - flew into enemy fire to evacuate the wounded. It was one of the most dangerous assignments in Vietnam. But to Fujii, saving lives felt like a purpose worth risking his own.

By 1971, he was a crew chief with the 237th Medical Detachment, 61st Medical Battalion, flying near the Laos border during Operation Lam Son 719. It was there that his life would take a turn that neither he nor the Army would ever forget.

On February 18, 1971, Fujii's medevac helicopter descended into a landing zone already engulfed in gunfire. An explosion rocked the aircraft. The Huey lost power, slammed into the ground, and

skidded into the chaos of battle. Fujii, dazed and wounded, pulled himself free and immediately began helping the crew and casualties escape the wreckage. When a second helicopter swooped down to rescue him, he waved it away. The fire was too intense; boarding would doom them all. And on the ground around him lay wounded South Vietnamese soldiers - men who had no one else to help them.

He stayed. For more than 17 hours, through darkness and gunfire, Fujii crawled through the makeshift perimeter, bandaging wounds and offering what comfort he could. When dawn broke and the enemy pressed closer, he grabbed a radio and began directing U.S. airstrikes with astonishing precision. Standing in full view of the enemy, he pointed out their positions to the gunships overhead, guiding rockets and machine-gun fire onto hostile troops threatening to overrun the defenders.

His radio calls were calm. His movements were deliberate. Even wounded himself, he refused to rest. As one pilot later said, “He saved that entire position.” When rescued, the helicopter carrying him was shot down again, and he survived a second crash. Only on a third attempt was he evacuated to safety. His actions earned him the Distinguished Service Cross, but the significance of his courage would not be fully recognized for decades.

It wasn’t until July 5, 2022, more than fifty years after the battle and after a medal review, that the nation corrected the oversight. In a ceremony at the White House, President Joe Biden awarded Fujii the Medal of Honor.

His citation reads:

> Specialist Five Dennis M. Fujii distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity beyond the call of duty while serving as crew chief aboard a helicopter ambulance during rescue operations in Laos, Republic of Vietnam, during the period of 18 to 22 February 1971. Specialist Five Fujii was serving with the 237th Medical Detachment, 61st Medical Battalion, 67th Medical Group. The team's mission was to evacuate seriously wounded Vietnamese military personnel from the midst of a raging battlefield. The aircraft's primary approach to the bullet-infested landing zone was thwarted by heavy volumes of enemy fire directed at the specialist's helicopter. As the pilot made a second landing attempt, the enemy concentrated a barrage of flak at the air ambulance which damaged the craft and caused it to crash in the conflict area, injuring Specialist Five Fujii. Moments later, another American helicopter successfully landed near the wreckage of the specialist's airship and extracted all the downed crewmen except for Specialist Five Fujii, who was unable to board due to the intense enemy fire directed at him. Rather than further endanger the lives of his comrades aboard the second helicopter, Specialist Five Fujii waved the craft out of the combat area and remained behind as the only American on the battlefield. Subsequent attempts to rescue the specialist were aborted due to the violent anti-aircraft fire. Specialist Five Fujii finally secured a radio and informed the aviators in the area that the landing zone was too hot for

> further evacuation attempts. During the night and all through the next day, Specialist Five Fujii disregarded his own wounds as he administered first aid to the allied casualties. On the night of 19 February, the allied perimeter came under ruthless assault by a reinforced enemy regiment supported by heavy artillery. Once again obtaining a radio transmitter, Specialist Five Fujii called in American helicopter gunships to assist the small unit in repelling the attack. For a period of over seventeen consecutive hours, Specialist Five Fujii repeatedly exposed himself to hostile fire as he left the security of his entrenchment to better observe enemy troop positions and to direct air strikes against them. At times the fighting became so vicious that Specialist Five Fujii was forced to interrupt radio transmittal in order to place suppressive rifle fire on the enemy while at close quarters. Though wounded and severely fatigued by 20 February, the specialist bore the responsibility for the protection and defense of the friendly encampment until an American helicopter could land and attempt to airlift him from the area. As his air ambulance left the battlefield, it received numerous hits and was forced to crash land at another South Vietnamese Ranger base approximately four kilometers from the specialist's original location. The totally exhausted Specialist Five Fujii remained at the allied camp for two more days until yet another helicopter could return him to Phau Bai for medical assistance on 22 February. Specialist Five Fujii's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

After returning home to Hawai‘i, Fujii slipped quietly back into civilian life. He served in the Hawai‘i Army National Guard and later the Pacific Army Reserve, but he never sought attention for what he had done. He married, raised children, and worked at various organizations, including a logistics position at Johnston Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. Those who knew him said he was humble to a fault, always more comfortable helping others than talking about himself.

Fujii was inducted into the “Gallery of Heroes” at the U.S. Army Museum of Hawai‘i. Yet even then, he remained the same soft-spoken son of Hanapēpē - grateful, humble, and modest about deeds that others considered legendary.

Gordon R. Roberts

Southern Ohio Boy to Social Worker

Gordon R. Roberts *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Gordon Ray Roberts was born on June 14, 1950, in Middletown, Ohio, but it was the nearby town of Lebanon where his life and character took form. Lebanon in the 1950s and 60s was a community defined by the lingering memory of World War II and Korea. Veterans were the coaches, the teachers, the fathers and uncles who shaped the rhythm of small-town life. Roberts often reflected that nearly every adult male he knew as a boy had served in uniform.

His family, too, was steeped in military heritage. His father had served in World War II, and his step-father had fought in the Pacific, leaving a deep impression on the young boy who admired him. Two of his brothers would later serve in the Navy.

His time at Lebanon High School was typically unremarkable. In May 1968, just three days after graduating high school and at only seventeen years old, Roberts enlisted in the United States Army. His training at Fort Benning introduced him to the relentless pace and intensity of the infantry, and by April 1969 he was deployed to Vietnam as a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile).

The crucible of Vietnam came on July 11, 1969, in Thừa Thiên Province. Roberts demonstrated extraordinary heroism when his unit came under heavy fire from a complex enemy bunker system. Acting with a speed and decisiveness far beyond his nineteen years, he charged and neutralized four enemy bunkers, repeatedly exposing himself to fire, even after his rifle was shot from his hands. His actions saved lives and broke the enemy's position. For this, he received the Medal of Honor on March 2, 1971, at the time becoming one of the youngest living recipients of the nation's highest military decoration.

He received the medal on March 2, 1971, from President Nixon.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sgt. Roberts distinguished himself while serving as a rifleman with Company B, during combat operations. Sgt. Roberts' platoon was maneuvering along a ridge to attack heavily fortified enemy bunker positions which had pinned down an adjoining friendly company. As the platoon approached the

enemy positions, it was suddenly pinned down by heavy automatic-weapons and grenade fire from camouflaged enemy fortifications atop the overlooking hill. Seeing his platoon immobilized and in danger of failing in its mission, Sgt. Roberts crawled rapidly toward the closest enemy bunker. With complete disregard for his safety, he leaped to his feet and charged the bunker, firing as he ran. Despite the intense enemy fire directed at him, Sgt. Roberts silenced the two-man bunker. Without hesitation, Sgt. Roberts continued his one-man assault on a second bunker. As he neared the second bunker, a burst of enemy fire knocked his rifle from his hands. Sgt. Roberts picked up a rifle dropped by a comrade and continued his assault, silencing the bunker. He continued his charge against a third bunker and destroyed it with well-thrown hand grenades. Although Sgt. Roberts was now cut off from his platoon, he continued his assault against a fourth enemy emplacement. He fought through a heavy hail of fire to join elements of an adjoining company which had been pinned down by the enemy fire. Although continually exposed to hostile fire, he assisted in moving wounded personnel from exposed positions on the hilltop to an evacuation area before returning to his unit. By his gallant and selfless actions, Sgt. Roberts contributed directly in saving the lives of his comrades and served as an inspiration to his fellow soldiers in the defeat of the enemy force. Sgt. Roberts' extraordinary heroism in action at the risk of his life were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

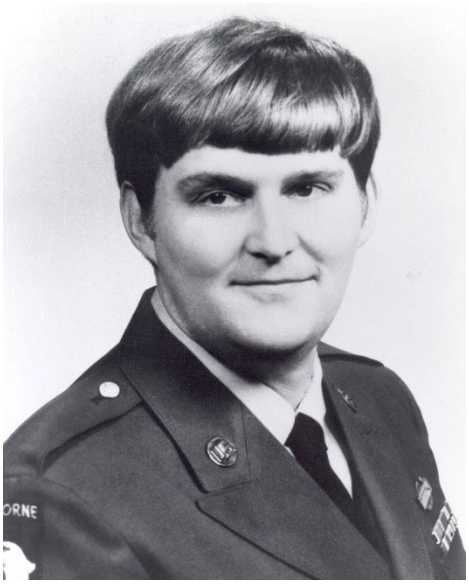
After returning home in 1970, Roberts sought a path rooted in education and compassion. He pursued a bachelor’s degree in sociology at the University of Dayton and later earned a Master of Social Work from the University of Cincinnati.

For nearly eighteen years, he served as a social worker and probation officer across southwestern Ohio. His work centered on domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental-health challenges.

In 1989, during the second chapter of his military career, he received a direct commission as a Medical Service Corps lieutenant in the Ohio National Guard. Two years later he returned to active duty, now as a commissioned officer. His assignments took him around the world - to Korea, Haiti, Iraq, Kuwait - and into leadership roles that impacted thousands. From 2008 to 2010 he served as Brigade Commander at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, guiding the institution at a time when wounded warriors depended on its leadership. He later became Command Surgeon for the 1st Sustainment Command (Theater). When he retired on May 18, 2012, Roberts had completed forty-four years of combined military service.

Michael J. Fitzmaurice

Meat Packing, Explosives and Plumbing



Michael J. Fitzmaurice
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Michael John Fitzmaurice entered the world on March 9, 1950, in the most unassuming of circumstances. His parents were simply passing through Jamestown, North Dakota, when he arrived earlier than expected. Within a month, the family was back across the state line, returning to the quiet prairies of South Dakota. Though his birth certificate reads "North Dakota," home was rural South Dakota.

The family eventually settled near Cavour, a small farming community where neighbors knew each other by name. In later interviews, Fitzmaurice hinted at a family legacy of service. Though he spoke little publicly about the details of his parents' lives, the expectations of duty and sacrifice stood behind him long before he ever put on a uniform.

Growing up, Fitzmaurice lived the kind of farm-town childhood that rarely makes headlines but often produces remarkable men. He attended Iroquois High School, a modest rural school. He worked nights in a meat-packing plant in Huron while still a teenager - an early introduction to the kind of hard, physical labor that most adults would struggle with. That experience, he later said, taught him discipline and grit before the Army.

He wasn't particularly informed about Southeast Asia. In his own words, he "didn't pay much attention to the war back then." What he did notice was the path in front of him. Rural life offered stability, but not opportunity. College seemed out of reach. Work was plentiful but repetitive.

Shortly after graduating in 1969, Fitzmaurice and three friends piled into a car and drove to Sioux Falls. They enlisted together, full of equal parts bravado, naïveté, and the typical invincibility of nineteen-year-olds. For Fitzmaurice, it would be a decision that changed the trajectory of his life - and the lives of the men he would later save - forever.

The Army sent him first to Fort Lewis for basic training, then to Fort Knox, where he trained as an armored reconnaissance specialist. Within months he was assigned to Troop D, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. Vietnam was no longer a distant issue from the evening news.

What happened on March 23, 1971, at Khe Sanh would later be engraved in the annals of American heroism. Enemy sappers infiltrated his platoon's perimeter and hurled explosive charges into their

bunker. Fitzmaurice acted with a speed and selflessness far beyond instinct. He threw two charges out. With no time left for the third, he threw himself and his flak vest over it. The explosion nearly killed him.

Blinded in one eye, bleeding, and dazed, he refused evacuation. He fought on - first with a damaged rifle, then hand-to-hand, then with a captured enemy weapon. His actions saved lives. His courage earned him the Medal of Honor.

On October 15, 1970, President Nixon awarded him the Medal of Honor.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sp4c. Fitzmaurice, 3d Platoon, Troop D, distinguished himself at Khesanh. Sp4c. Fitzmaurice and three fellow soldiers were occupying a bunker when a company of North Vietnamese sappers infiltrated the area. At the onset of the attack Sp4c. Fitzmaurice observed three explosive charges which had been thrown into the bunker by the enemy. Realizing the imminent danger to his comrades, and with complete disregard for his personal safety, he hurled two of the charges out of the bunker. He then threw his flak vest and himself over the remaining charge. By this courageous act he absorbed the blast and shielded his fellow soldiers. Although suffering from serious multiple wounds and partial loss of sight, he charged out of the bunker and engaged the enemy until his rifle was damaged by the blast of an enemy hand grenade. While in search of another weapon, Sp4c. Fitzmaurice encountered and overcame an enemy sapper in hand-to-hand combat. Having obtained another weapon, he returned to his original fighting position and inflicted additional casualties on the attacking enemy. Although seriously wounded, Sp4c. Fitzmaurice refused to be medically evacuated, preferring to remain at his post. Sp4c. Fitzmaurice's extraordinary heroism in action at the risk of his life contributed significantly to the successful defense of the position and resulted in saving the lives of a number of his fellow soldiers. These acts of heroism go above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflect great credit on Sp4c. Fitzmaurice and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

After leaving active duty in 1972, Fitzmaurice returned home not as a celebrated hero but as a young man trying to rebuild health and life. He went back to the meat-packing plant, carving pork as he had before the war.

He briefly attempted a job as a benefits counselor with the VA in Nevada, but the fit wasn't right, and he returned to South Dakota. In 1973, he married Patricia "Patty" Dolan, and together they built a quiet life in Hartford, raising their children far from the noise of the battlefield that had defined his youth.

In 1987, he joined the South Dakota Army National Guard, later transferring into the Air National Guard. That same year he began working in maintenance at the Sioux Falls VA, specializing in plumbing. For twenty-four years his world was wrenches, pipes, and plumbing.

He retired in 2011, the same year the state honored him by naming its veterans home in Hot Springs after him - the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Though celebrated, Fitzmaurice remained humble. He rejected the title of "hero," insisting he was "just lucky and did my job."

Kenneth J. David

HVAC Tradesman & Veteran Volunteer

Kenneth David *(Image Provided by C. Douglas Sterner)*

Kenneth J. David was born on January 21, 1950, in the quiet steel-town surroundings of Girard, Ohio. Young Ken was serious and once he committed to an organization, he was an active participant. As a Boy Scout he earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

He passed through the halls of Girard High School as a straightforward young man. In 1969, during the height of the Vietnam War, David entered the U.S. Army. He completed basic training at Fort Campbell and advanced training at Fort Polk before shipping out, assigned as a radio-telephone operator with Company D, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division.

What happened on May 7, 1970, near Fire Support Base Maureen in Thừa Thiên Province became the defining moment 0f his military service. When his unit came under fierce attack, David repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire, drawing attention away from wounded comrades. Even after being wounded by a satchel charge, he continued to fight, to move, to pull others to safety. “I did what I was trained to do,” he would later say, distilling an act of extraordinary valor into a sentence of characteristic humility.

For that day he was first awarded the Distinguished Service Cross - upgraded to the Medal of Honor fifty-five years later.

Long after Vietnam, and upon efforts of his friends documented in a Veterans Radio interview attached, President Biden awarded this private the Medal of Honor on January 3, 2025.

His citation reads:

> Private First Class Kenneth J. David distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on May 7, 1970, while serving as a radio-telephone operator with Company D, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, near Fire Support Base Maureen, Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam. On this date, Private First Class David's company came under an intense attack from a large hostile force. The enemy’s ferocious initial assault mortally wounded the company’s Platoon Leader and resulted in numerous other friendly casualties. Upon the initial assault and without hesitation, Private First Class David handed his radio to his Platoon Sergeant and moved forward to the

defensive perimeter, unleashing a barrage of automatic weapons fire on the enemy. From this location, Private First Class David bitterly resisted all enemy efforts to overrun his position. Realizing the impact of the enemy assault on the wounded who were being brought to the center of the perimeter, Private First Class David, without regard for his own life, moved to a position outside of the perimeter while continuing to engage the enemy. Each time the enemy attempted to concentrate its fire on the wounded inside the perimeter, Private First Class David would jump from his position and yell to draw the enemy fire away from his injured comrades and back to himself. Refusing to withdraw in the face of the concentrated enemy fire now directed toward him, he continued to engage the enemy. Although wounded by an exploding satchel charge and running perilously low on ammunition, he tossed hand grenades toward the attackers to effectively counter their fire. The unit's medic, realizing that Private First Class David had been injured, moved to his position to provide aid, but Private First Class David assured him that he was okay and continued to fight on. Private First Class David's courageous and selfless actions continued to draw the enemy fire away from the incoming medevac helicopters, allowing the wounded to be safely evacuated. After allied reinforcements fought their way to his company's position, Private First Class David carried a wounded comrade to a sheltered position. He then returned to the contact area and continued to engage the enemy and provide covering fire for the wounded until the enemy broke contact and fled, at which point he too was medically evacuated. Private First Class David's conspicuous gallantry, extraordinary heroism, and intrepidity at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

As David told Veterans Radio in an interview, "I did what I was trained to do," distilling an act of extraordinary valor into a sentence of characteristic humility.

Kenneth J. David *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Beyond Service

Yet the war did not end for him when the fighting stopped. David came home in 1971 to a country that did not celebrate returning Vietnam veterans. "The government took my smile away," he would later say. The transition to civilian life was marked by emotional struggle, disillusionment, and the quiet carryover of trauma that so many Vietnam veterans brought home with them. But out of that painful chapter came the central promise of David's life:

“Whatever I can do for the person behind me, that’s what I’m going to do.”

He found work in the HVAC trade, settling into the rhythm of blue-collar labor in Trumbull County. The trade gave him steady purpose, but it was not where he made his greatest civilian impact. That came through service.

Over the decades that followed, David became a cornerstone of the veteran community in northeastern Ohio. As Adjutant and Finance Officer of Disabled American Veterans Chapter 11, he dedicated more than fourteen years to outreach, support, and hands-on assistance. He wrote newsletters that connected veterans to resources, organized food giveaways for those struggling to make ends meet, located mobility equipment for disabled veterans, and quietly passed out $50 or $100 grocery cards to families in crisis. “They have nothing,” he said in one interview. “But $100 is so important to them.” This simple awareness of someone else’s hardship - and his instinctive desire to relieve it - guided every part of his post-military life.

He also served in the Military Order of the Purple Heart and was active with VFW Post 3767, helping raise funds for scholarships, veteran support programs, and community outreach. He volunteered for Honor Guard and Casket Guard details, standing silent witness at funerals, making sure no veteran left this world unnoticed. He even helped lead efforts to rename local bridges after military heroes, ensuring that remembrance endured in public spaces long after the war had faded in memory.

When he spoke with Veterans Radio, David reflected on this long arc of service. The HVAC work, the community roles, the small acts of generosity - all of it stemmed from the same place as his actions in Vietnam: a refusal to abandon the person beside him. During the interview, he acknowledged the challenging attention that came with the Medal of Honor, but redirected its meaning outward. “I want them to enjoy the moment with me,” he said. “It’s not about me; it’s about all the people around me.” And when the host described him simply as “a very humble man, worked in HVAC in Trumbull County,” David offered no correction. Humility, after all, was not a pose - it was the truth of him.

In the end, the measure of Kenneth J. David is not only in the valor of a single day in 1970, but in the quiet decades afterward - decades in which he chose, again and again, to serve. His life stands as a reminder that heroism does not end with the final shot fired. Sometimes it begins long after the battlefield has gone silent.

Peter C. Lemon

Canadian Born and Survivor's Guilt

Peter C. Lemon *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Peter Charles Lemon's story did not begin in the United States. He was born on June 5, 1950, in Toronto, Canada, the son of Charles and Geraldine Lemon. When Peter was only two years old, the Lemon family crossed the border into the United States and settled in the small lakeside town of Tawas City, Michigan. He grew up with his sister, Judy, and brother, Richard.

One of the most defining memories of his youth came in 1961, when Peter, then eleven (11) years old, stood beside his family as they raised their hands to take the oath of American citizenship.

Peter attended Tawas Area High School, where he was known as an average student. He graduated in 1968, at a time when the Vietnam War loomed large in the lives of young men. Unsure of his future, Lemon took a factory job in Saginaw, Michigan. But the monotonous rhythm of industrial work did little to satisfy his sense of purpose. Within months, he enlisted in the United States Army in 1969.

The Army sent him to Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry. By the spring of 1970, he was serving as an assistant machine-gunner at Fire Support Base Illingworth in Tay Ninh Province. It was here, on the night of April 1, that his life - and the lives of those around him - would change forever.

In the early hours of the morning, the base came under overwhelming attack. Enemy soldiers poured forward in a coordinated assault, their mortars and rockets lighting the darkness. Lemon's machine gun jammed early in the fight, forcing him to grab grenades and hurl them as enemy troops crashed through the defenses. Wounded repeatedly, he fought hand-to-hand, refusing to fall back. At one point, battered and bleeding, he climbed atop an exposed berm and fired a machine gun directly into the advancing force until he collapsed from exhaustion and blood loss. Even then, he refused evacuation until the more gravely wounded were carried to safety.

For these acts, Peter C. Lemon received the Medal of Honor from President Richard Nixon on June 15, 1971. He was just twenty-one years old - the only Canadian-born U.S. citizen to receive the medal for actions in Vietnam.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sgt. Lemon (then Sp4c.), Company E, distinguished himself while serving as an assistant machine gunner during the defense of Fire Support Base Illingworth. When the base came under heavy enemy attack, Sgt. Lemon engaged a numerically superior enemy with machine-gun and rifle fire from his defensive position until both weapons malfunctioned. He then used hand grenades to fend off the intensified enemy attack launched in his direction. After eliminating all but one of the enemy soldiers in the immediate vicinity, he pursued and disposed of the remaining soldier in hand-to-hand combat. Despite fragment wounds from an exploding grenade, Sgt. Lemon regained his position, carried a more seriously wounded comrade to an aid station, and, as he returned, was wounded a second time by enemy fire. Disregarding his personal injuries, he moved to his position through a hail of small-arms and grenade fire. Sgt. Lemon immediately realized that the defensive sector was in danger of being overrun by the enemy and unhesitatingly assaulted the enemy soldiers by throwing hand grenades and engaging in hand-to-hand combat. He was wounded yet a third time, but his determined efforts successfully drove the enemy from the position. Securing an operable machine gun, Sgt. Lemon stood atop an embankment fully exposed to enemy fire, and placed effective fire upon the enemy until he collapsed from his multiple wounds and exhaustion. After regaining consciousness at the aid station, he refused medical evacuation until his more seriously wounded comrades had been evacuated. Sgt. Lemon's gallantry and extraordinary heroism are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Beyond Service

He turned to education as his entryway back into the world. At Colorado State University, he studied speech, graduating in 1979. Two years later, he completed a Master of Science in Business Administration at the University of Northern Colorado.

Peter married his wife Diane shortly before receiving the Medal of Honor, and together they raised three children. Family became a grounding force, providing balance amid the lingering shadows of war and the responsibilities of his growing professional life.

He had tremendous survivor’s guilt about the men who paid with their lives that day. He refused to wear the medal for years and stuffed it in a shoe box in the closet. He told author and friend C. Douglas Sterner about a conversation with his lieutenant, Greg Peters commander of the Recon

Platoon, decades later who said “Pete, I chose you because I knew that you were the one who would always wear it (the Medal of Honor) to keep alive the heroic story of us all.” This helped unlock the guilt.

Over the years, Lemon built a diverse career as an entrepreneur, civic leader, and public speaker. He wrote *Beyond the Medal*, a book aimed at inspiring young people, and he served as executive producer of a PBS documentary highlighting the human stories behind the Medal of Honor. Business ventures in insurance, consulting, and hospitality followed, each shaped by the same determination that had defined his military service. His achievements earned him recognition far beyond the battlefield, including induction into the Ranger Hall of Fame and an “Outstanding American by Choice” award presented by President Barack Obama.

Yet for all the accolades, Peter’s focus remained fixed on service - on honoring the men who fought beside him, on teaching younger generations about citizenship, sacrifice, and the power of choice.

Britt K. Slabinski

Eagle Scout Then SEAL Then Business Consultant

Britt K. Slabinski *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Britt Kelly Slabinski was born on December 1, 1969, in Northampton, Massachusetts, a New England town where community, hard work, and quiet humility were woven into daily life. His childhood was neither glamorous nor defined by great privilege, but it unfolded in an environment that valued service - something that would shape him long before he'd ever step onto a battlefield. At age fourteen, he achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, which requires commitment.

Slabinski attended Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, graduating in 1988. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy immediately after high school. His early Navy training began in Orlando, Florida, followed by Radioman "A" School in San Diego. He had a desire to become a Navy SEAL. It was not a romantic ambition; it was a test, a proving ground. In January 1990, after enduring the unforgiving trials of Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training as a member of Class 164, he earned the right to wear the SEAL Trident. It marked the beginning of a 25-year journey defined by rigor, sacrifice, and a commitment to the men beside him.

Slabinski's career took him first to SEAL Team 4, and then, in 1993, to the Naval Special Warfare Development Group - one of the most elite units in the world. Over the next two decades, he completed nine overseas deployments and fifteen combat operations. His service spanned a period of global upheaval, from the late Cold War years to the long campaigns that followed September 11, 2001.

Yet no single moment would define him more than the events of March 4, 2002, on a remote Afghan peak known as Takur Ghar. That day, during Operation Anaconda, Slabinski led a small team into one of the most harrowing battles of the war. Under intense enemy fire, facing impossible terrain and overwhelming odds, he repeatedly exposed himself to danger to reach wounded teammates and hold their position.

Slabinski on Roberts Ridge (Takur Ghar) in March 2002 (Age 32/33)
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

In 2018, more than sixteen years after the battle, he received the Medal of Honor - a recognition he insisted belonged to the men who fought and died beside him. President Donald J. Trump awarded him the medal.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while assigned to a Joint Task Force in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. In the early morning of 4 March 2002, Senior Chief Special Warfare Operator Slabinski led a reconnaissance team to its assigned area atop a 10,000-foot snow-covered mountain. Their insertion helicopter was suddenly riddled with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire from

previously undetected enemy positions. The crippled helicopter lurched violently and ejected one teammate onto the mountain before the pilots were forced to crash land in the valley far below. Senior Chief Slabinski boldly rallied his five remaining team members and marshalled supporting assets for an assault to rescue their stranded teammate. During reinsertion the team came under fire from three directions, and one teammate started moving uphill toward an enemy strongpoint. Without regard for his own safety, Senior Chief Slabinski charged directly toward enemy fire to join his teammate. Together, they fearlessly assaulted and cleared the first bunker they encountered. The enemy then unleashed a hail of machine gun fire from a second hardened position only twenty meters away. Senior Chief Slabinski repeatedly exposed himself to deadly fire to personally engage the second enemy bunker and orient his team's fires in the furious, close-quarters firefight. Proximity made air support impossible, and after several teammates became casualties, the situation became untenable. Senior Chief Slabinski maneuvered his team to a more defensible position, directed air strikes in very close proximity to his team's position, and requested reinforcements. As daylight approached, accurate enemy mortar fire forced the team further down the sheer mountainside. Senior Chief Slabinski carried a seriously wounded teammate through deep snow and led a difficult trek across precipitous terrain while calling in fire on the enemy, which was engaging the team from the surrounding ridges. Throughout the next 14 hours, Senior Chief Slabinski stabilized the casualties and continued the fight against the enemy until the hill was secured and his team was extracted. By his undaunted courage, bold initiative, leadership, and devotion to duty, Senior Chief Slabinski reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Beyond Service

By the time he retired in 2014, Command Master Chief Slabinski had served in roles ranging from senior enlisted advisor to director of Special Warfare safety programs. Yet retirement did not dull his sense of mission. Instead, it redirected it.

In civilian life, Slabinski chose not the path of quiet retreat but one of forward momentum. He became a corporate consultant, guiding leaders and organizations through the complexities of decision-making, team-building, and resilience. His lessons, drawn from combat and forged in hardship, proved universally relevant: clarity under pressure, humility in leadership, and accountability as the foundation of trust.

He also embraced the role of mentor and advocate. He contributed to efforts that educate young people on citizenship, courage, and service.

Beyond the podium and boardroom, Slabinski maintained his certification as a paramedic - an emblem of his enduring desire to assist those in crisis. He also supported charitable and veteran-oriented initiatives, including those connected to families of fallen service members, where his influence helped ensure that sacrifice was honored with action, not just words.

Despite his public profile, Slabinski continued to guard his private life closely. He is a father, a son, and a man deeply shaped by the relationships that grounded him through the storms of military life. He carries the memory of the teammates he lost, insisting that their courage - not his own - deserves the spotlight.

David G. Bellavia

Robbery Victim to Fallujah

David Gregory Bellavia often said that a life is shaped not only by the battles fought overseas, but by the moments at home that force a man to face himself. In his Veterans Radio interview, he spoke openly about one such moment - a quiet night in western New York during his college years. It was just an ordinary evening until an intruder slipped into his family's house. Afterward, shaken by how helpless he had felt in protecting the people he loved, he found himself confronting a truth he had not expected. "I didn't act," he admitted. A seed was planted that he had to protect people in the future.

David G. Bellavia
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Born November 10, 1975, in Buffalo, New York, Bellavia was the youngest of four sons in a close-knit family. His grandfather, Joseph Brunacini, a Bronze Star recipient who fought through the hedgerows of Normandy, rarely spoke of his own heroism. Instead, he insisted that service was less about medals and more about understanding life's true meaning. "Family, peace, and tranquility mean more after you've been through a crucible," Bellavia recalled. The quiet wisdom of his grandfather would stay with him long after the two had their last conversation.

Bellavia grew up in the greater Buffalo region, attending Lyndonville High School and later studying at Franklin Pierce University and the University at Buffalo. Yet civilian life felt disjointed - classes, part-time work, and responsibilities that never seemed to cohere into a larger purpose. In his Veterans Radio interview, he explained that the Army offered something he had been craving for years: simplicity of mission and honesty of purpose. "The clarity was refreshing," he said. "You knew what mattered. You knew who depended on you."

He enlisted in 1999, becoming an infantryman with the 1st Infantry Division. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the trajectory of his service sharpened. Many soldiers wrestled with whether to stay or leave; Bellavia made his choice instantly. He would remain in the infantry, shoulder the burden, and go where the country needed him. Deployments followed - first Kosovo, then Iraq with the Ramrods of 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment.

On Veterans Radio, Bellavia emphasized the unique brotherhood of combat. “We weren’t all friends,” he said. “But we trusted each other. Trust is everything.” That trust became the lifeline of every mission they executed in Diyala, Mosul, Baqubah, and eventually the most infamous urban battleground of the Iraq War: Fallujah.

Nothing would define his service more than the night of November 10, 2004 - his 29th birthday - during the ferocious fighting of Operation Phantom Fury. His platoon was trapped under fire inside a house that had become a deathtrap. As the squad leader, Bellavia made the decision he later described simply: “I couldn’t send someone else in.” He charged in alone, clearing the first floor, then fighting room to room and up the staircase against determined insurgents. His actions saved the trapped soldiers and turned the tide within that structure. Much of his actions were captured on video by an Australian television crew. Years later, the nation would recognize those actions with the Medal of Honor - but he always insisted the medal belonged to the Ramrods, not just him.

President Donald Trump awarded him the medal on June 25, 2019.

His citation reads:

> Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on November 10, 2004, while serving as a squad leader in support of Operation Phantom Fury in Fallujah, Iraq. While clearing a house, a squad from Staff Sergeant Bellavia’s platoon became trapped within a room by intense enemy fire coming from a fortified position under the stairs leading to the second floor. Recognizing the immediate severity of the situation, and with disregard for his own safety, Staff Sergeant Bellavia retrieved an automatic weapon and entered the doorway of the house to engage the insurgents. With enemy rounds impacting around him, Staff Sergeant Bellavia fired at the enemy position at a cyclic rate, providing covering fire that allowed the squad to break contact and exit the house. A Bradley Fighting Vehicle was brought forward to suppress the enemy; however, due to high walls surrounding the house, it could not fire directly at the enemy position. Staff Sergeant Bellavia then re-entered the house and again came under intense enemy fire. He observed an enemy insurgent preparing to launch a rocket-propelled grenade at his platoon. Recognizing the grave danger the grenade posed to his fellow soldiers, Staff Sergeant Bellavia assaulted the enemy position, killing one insurgent and wounding another who ran to a different part of the house. Staff Sergeant Bellavia, realizing he had an un-cleared, darkened room to his back, moved to clear it. As he entered, an insurgent came down the stairs firing at him. Simultaneously, the previously wounded insurgent reemerged and engaged Staff Sergeant Bellavia. Staff Sergeant Bellavia, entering further into the darkened room, returned fire and eliminated both insurgents. Staff Sergeant Bellavia then received enemy fire from another insurgent

emerging from a closet in the darkened room. Exchanging gunfire, Staff Sergeant Bellavia pursued the enemy up the stairs and eliminated him. Now on the second floor, Staff Sergeant Bellavia moved to a door that opened onto the roof. At this point, a fifth insurgent leapt from the third floor roof onto the second floor roof. Staff Sergeant Bellavia engaged the insurgent through a window, wounding him in the back and legs, and caused him to fall off the roof. Acting on instinct to save the members of his platoon from an imminent threat, Staff Sergeant Bellavia ultimately cleared an entire enemy-filled house, destroyed four insurgents, and badly wounded a fifth. Staff Sergeant Bellavia's bravery, complete disregard for his own safety, and unselfish and courageous actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States.

Beyond Service

He left the Army in 2005, transitioning back into civilian life with the invisible weight many veterans carry. For years, he avoided reunions with his platoon, convinced their paths had diverged beyond repair. Yet the Medal of Honor ceremony in 2019 sparked an emotional reconnection. In his Veterans Radio recollections, he described how the award unexpectedly brought the Ramrods back together. "We finally talked - really talked," he said. For the first time, they openly shared the burdens each had carried alone. Healing, long delayed, finally began.

David G. Bellavia
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

After receiving the Medal of Honor, Bellavia did not let the recognition separate him from ordinary Americans. Instead, he spent nearly three years traveling the country. He wrote his memoir *"House to House"* and hosted a public radio show in Buffalo, New York. Regarding his public speaking events he said on Veterans Radio "This isn't about autographs or recognition. It's about explaining that every person faces a moment when they must choose who they really are."

For Bellavia, the crucible had been both personal and wartime. He believed deeply that family, peace, and meaning grow from sacrifice - not in spite of it. His life after the military became a mission of storytelling, mentoring, and preserving the legacy of those who fought beside him.

Leroy A. Petry

Five Brothers to the Brotherhood of Eight Deployments

Leroy A. Petry *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Leroy Arthur Petry born on July 29, 1979, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the third of five sons born to Larry and Lorella Petry. His childhood was one defined by activity, curiosity, and a drive that revealed itself early. Growing up in a close-knit Mexican-American family, Leroy embraced the values of hard work and resilience that his parents instilled in their children. Whether playing football and basketball, fixing cars, or experimenting in the kitchen, he carried an energetic determination that hinted at the soldier he would one day become.

Yet Petry's youth was not without challenges. His academic path was rocky, beginning at Santa Fe High School, where he struggled enough to repeat his freshman year. For many, such early setbacks might have dampened ambition, but Leroy's story is one of steady ascent. Seeking a better fit, he transferred to St. Catherine's Indian High School. It proved to be a turning point. His grades improved, his confidence grew, and in May 1998, he graduated as part of the final class to walk the halls of that small Santa Fe school. In the months that followed, he worked alongside his father and grandfather in various trades - vehicle maintenance, sign-making, and local labor jobs - absorbing lessons about responsibility and independence.

Petry went on to attend New Mexico Highlands University for a year. Since the age of seven, he had dreamed of military service. In September 1999, at twenty years old, he enlisted in the United States Army

After completing basic training, Petry volunteered for one of the Army's most demanding units: the 75th Ranger Regiment. He completed Airborne School and the rigorous Ranger Assessment and Selection Program, earning a place in the elite 2nd Battalion. Over the next decade, he deployed eight times - two tours to Iraq and six to Afghanistan - each mission reinforcing his reputation as a disciplined, courageous, and dependable Ranger.

His defining moment came on May 26, 2008, in Paktia Province, Afghanistan. During a daylight raid against a Taliban compound, Petry and his fellow Rangers were caught in ferocious enemy fire. Shot through both legs early in the fight, he refused to surrender to injury. When an enemy

grenade landed between him and two fellow Rangers, Petry made a split-second decision. He reached out, grabbed the grenade, and hurled it away - but not far enough to spare himself. The explosion tore off his right hand at the wrist, but his action saved the lives of his teammates. For this act of astonishing valor, Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama on July 12, 2011.

Petry after receiving the Medal of Honor at the White House in 2011 *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty: Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with an armed enemy in the vicinity of Paktya Province, Afghanistan, on May 26, 2008. As a Weapons Squad Leader with D Company, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Staff Sergeant Petry moved to clear the courtyard of a house that potentially contained high-value combatants. While crossing the courtyard, Staff Sergeant Petry and another Ranger were engaged and wounded by automatic weapons fire from enemy fighters. Still under enemy fire, and wounded in both legs, Staff Sergeant Petry led the other Ranger to cover. He then reported the situation and engaged the enemy with a hand grenade, providing suppression as

> another Ranger moved to his position. The enemy quickly responded by maneuvering closer and throwing grenades. The first grenade explosion knocked his two fellow Rangers to the ground and wounded them both with shrapnel. A second grenade then landed only a few feet away from them. Instantly realizing the danger, Staff Sergeant Petry, unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his safety, deliberately and selflessly moved forward, picked up the grenade, and in an effort to clear the immediate threat, threw the grenade away from his fellow Rangers. As he was releasing the grenade it detonated, amputating his right hand at the wrist and further injuring him with multiple shrapnel wounds. Although picking up and throwing the live grenade grievously wounded Staff Sergeant Petry, his gallant act undeniably saved his fellow Rangers from being severely wounded or killed. Despite the severity of his wounds, Staff Sergeant Petry continued to maintain the presence of mind to place a tourniquet on his right wrist before communicating the situation by radio in order to coordinate support for himself and his fellow wounded Rangers. Staff Sergeant Petry's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service, and reflect great credit upon himself, 75th Ranger Regiment, and the United States Army.

But heroism did not remove him from service. Even after recovering from surgeries and adapting to a state-of-the-art prosthetic hand, Petry remained in uniform. He continued to serve as a wounded-warrior liaison and leader within the Special Operations community, eventually rising to the rank of Master Sergeant before retiring on July 29, 2014 - his thirty-fifth birthday.

Beyond Service

Beyond the battlefield, Petry’s life is anchored by family. He married Ashley, with whom he shares one son, and became stepfather to her three children. Despite the demands of military life, he remained a devoted husband and father, finding peace in time spent golfing, hunting, fishing, and enjoying the outdoors.

After retiring from active duty, Petry chose a new mission: empowering others. He pursued higher education at Pierce College, working toward a degree in Business Management, and began shaping a post-military career rooted in leadership and service. As a public speaker, Petry travels the country sharing lessons on resilience, teamwork, and sacrifice. He joined consulting ventures such as Mission 6 Zero, collaborating with fellow Medal of Honor recipients and veterans to provide leadership education and organizational guidance. His story is not only one of bravery in combat but of continued commitment to improving lives - especially those of wounded service members.

William D. Swenson

Seattle to Kunar

William D. Swenson *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

William D. Swenson was born on November 2, 1978, in the Pacific Northwest, a product of Seattle's quiet rain-soaked neighborhoods and the region's culture. Father Nicholas and mother Elna Pehrsdotter created a strong family unit. He grew up in a city shaped by maritime grit, aerospace ambition, and restless curiosity. After finishing high school in Seattle, Swenson enrolled at Seattle University, where he pursued a Bachelor of Science in Political Science. He graduated in 2001, a moment in American history defined by the shockwaves of 9/11. He did not come from a traditional military pipeline - but a Catholic Jesuit education. Nevertheless in September 2002, he entered Officer Candidate School and emerged a commissioned infantry officer, ready to join a force now fully committed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The infantry became his profession. He completed the Infantry Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, earned his Ranger tab, and passed through Airborne School. Swenson was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, part of the famed 10th Mountain Division. Over the next several years, he deployed once to Iraq and twice to Afghanistan, gaining a growing reputation among peers and Afghan partners for his steadfastness, calm under pressure, and refusal to compromise on standards - especially when it involved the safety of his soldiers.

It was during his second Afghan deployment, on September 8, 2009, that Captain Swenson was tested. Embedded as an advisor to the Afghan Border Police, he joined a partnered patrol entering the village of Ganjgal in Kunar Province. At first light, more than sixty well-prepared insurgents poured fire down onto the column. Over the next six hours, Swenson repeatedly exposed himself to near-certain death - coordinating fires, evacuating the wounded under direct fire, recovering the fallen, and rejecting repeated enemy calls to surrender. At one point, he was captured on a battlefield video carrying a wounded comrade through gunfire before returning to the fight again. His efforts were caught on live feed video from medevac helicopters. The Battle of Ganjgal remains one of the most scrutinized engagements of the Afghan War, and Swenson's actions stand as one of its few unambiguous examples of extraordinary valor.

On October 15, 2013, President Barack Obama awarded him the Medal of Honor.

Swenson receives the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

His citation reads:

> Captain William D. Swenson distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kunar Province, Afghanistan on September 8, 2009. On that morning, more than 60 well-armed, well-positioned enemy fighters ambushed Captain Swenson's combat team as it moved on foot into the village of Ganjgal for a meeting with village elders. As the enemy unleashed a barrage of rocket-propelled grenade, mortar and machine gun fire, Captain Swenson immediately returned fire and coordinated and directed the response of his Afghan Border Police, while simultaneously calling in suppressive artillery fire and aviation support. After the enemy effectively flanked Coalition Forces, Captain Swenson repeatedly called for smoke to cover the withdrawal of the forward elements. Surrounded on three sides by enemy forces inflicting effective and accurate fire, Captain Swenson coordinated air assets, indirect fire support and medical evacuation helicopter support to allow for the evacuation of the wounded. Captain Swenson ignored enemy radio transmissions demanding surrender and maneuvered uncovered to render medical aid to a wounded fellow soldier. Captain Swenson stopped administering aid long enough to throw a grenade at approaching

enemy forces, before assisting with moving the soldier for air evacuation. With complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Swenson unhesitatingly led a team in an unarmored vehicle into the kill zone, exposing himself to enemy fire on at least two occasions, to recover the wounded and search for four missing comrades. After using aviation support to mark locations of fallen and wounded comrades, it became clear that ground recovery of the fallen was required due to heavy enemy fire on helicopter landing zones. Captain Swenson's team returned to the kill zone another time in a Humvee. Captain Swenson voluntarily exited the vehicle, exposing himself to enemy fire, to locate and recover three fallen Marines and one fallen Navy corpsman. His exceptional leadership and stout resistance against the enemy during six hours of continuous fighting rallied his teammates and effectively disrupted the enemy's assault. Captain William D. Swenson's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Task Force Phoenix, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

Swenson had returned to Seattle in 2011, sorting out the complicated legacy of the battle. When his Medal of Honor was approved, he was not in uniform and not employed. He was reluctant to step into the spotlight and carry the weight of the award inevitably brings. But instead of retreating, Swenson did what he had always done - he continued to serve. In October 2013, shortly after receiving the Medal, he requested to return to active duty. The Army approved the request, and by March 2014 he was back in uniform, serving as a plans officer at I Corps Headquarters. Later, he was assigned to the U.S. Army South, and in 2017 he completed a Master of Arts in Security Studies from the Naval Postgraduate School. On October 31, 2019, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.

Parallel to his military service, Swenson began assuming a role in the civic life of the veteran community. In 2018, he joined the Board of Directors of the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation. His presence on the board - alongside national leaders, military legends, and public figures - signaled a new phase of influence. He lent his voice to issues of accountability, leadership, and the moral weight carried by those who serve in combat.

Lt. Colonel William D. Swenson stands as one of the very few Medal of Honor recipients going back on active duty - a soldier who never sought recognition. He is not defined by the medal he wears, but by the values that earned it: courage, principle, and a stubborn insistence on doing what is right, even when no one is watching.

Edward C. Byers, Jr.

Toledo & Grand Rapids Childhood to Special Operator

Edward Carl Byers Jr. entered the world on August 4, 1979, in Toledo, Ohio - a region shaped by hard work, modest living, and Midwest ROOTS. Raised in the communities around Grand Rapids, Michigan and Toledo, Ohio, he grew up in a home that understood service. His father had served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, and the stories of that generation of sailors were part of the family's atmosphere.

Edward C. Byers, Jr. *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

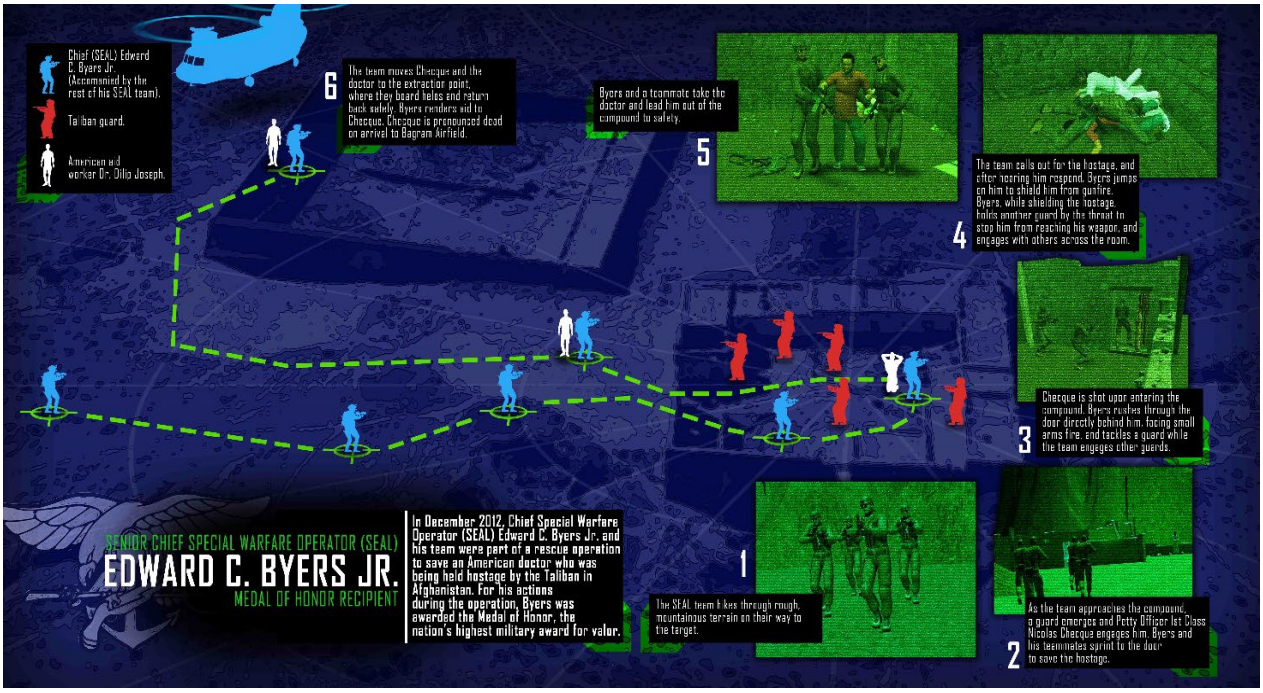
As a young man, Byers was curious and always in motion. Scouting became one of his first formative experiences; he rose to the rank of First Class Scout, learning early lessons in responsibility, leadership, and camaraderie. At Otsego High School in Tontogany, Ohio - where he balanced academics with sports until graduating in 1997.

He enlisted in the United States Navy in September 1998. The path he originally chose was hospital corpsman. His early deployments - including duty with the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit - placed him in environments where adaptability and quick thinking were as essential as medical knowledge. These experiences exposed him to the world of special operations and started a transition that would define the next two decades of his life.

In 2002, Byers completed Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S). Class 242 pushed him through pain, discomfort, and exhaustion. He not only passed but continued on through SEAL Qualification Training and later completing the intensive Special Operations Combat Medic course. Over the next 17 years, he deployed at least 11 times, including nine combat tours throughout Iraq, Afghanistan, and other undisclosed locations.

One night in December 2012, in Laghman Province, Afghanistan after Taliban fighters kidnapped American physician Dr. Dilip Joseph, Byers volunteered for the hostage rescue.

The SEAL team's nighttime assault required a grueling approach over harsh ground before breaching the target building. Amid the chaos, Byers fought hand-to-hand with enemy guards, shielded the hostage with his own body, pinned another militant to allow a teammate to neutralize the threat, and then immediately provided medical care during extraction. His actions saved Dr. Joseph's life.



An information graphic showing the December 2012 rescue mission *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

For his gallantry, he received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama on February 29, 2016.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a Hostage Rescue Force Team Member in Afghanistan in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM from 8 to 9 December 2012. As the rescue force approached the target building, an enemy sentry detected them and darted inside to alert his fellow captors. The sentry quickly reemerged, and the lead assaulter attempted to neutralize him. Chief Byers with his team sprinted to the door of the target building. As the primary breacher, Chief Byers stood in the doorway fully exposed to enemy fire while ripping down six layers of heavy blankets fastened to the inside ceiling and walls to clear a path for the rescue force. The first assaulter pushed his way through the blankets, and was mortally wounded by enemy small arms fire from within. Chief Byers, completely aware of the imminent threat, fearlessly rushed into the room and engaged an enemy guard aiming an AK-

> 47 at him. He then tackled another adult male who had darted towards the corner of the room. During the ensuing hand-to-hand struggle, Chief Byers confirmed the man was not the hostage and engaged him. As other rescue team members called out to the hostage, Chief Byers heard a voice respond in English and raced toward it. He jumped atop the American hostage and shielded him from the high volume of fire within the small room. While covering the hostage with his body, Chief Byers immobilized another guard with his bare hands, and restrained the guard until a teammate could eliminate him. His bold and decisive actions under fire saved the lives of the hostage and several of his teammates. By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of near certain death, Chief Petty Officer Byers reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

He would eventually retire as a Master Chief Petty Officer after 21 years of service.

Beyond Service

Off the battlefield, Byers' personal life remained anchored by his faith and family. A practicing Roman Catholic, he often spoke of the grounding influence of his wife Madison and their daughter Hannah. They lived through the rhythms of deployments, training cycles, and uncertainty - quiet sacrifices seldom seen by the public but deeply felt in military families.

Even while serving, Byers sought academic growth. He completed a Bachelor of Science in Strategic Studies and Defense Analysis from Norwich University. After retiring from the Navy in 2019, he pursued and earned an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania - one of the most competitive business programs in the world. His transition into the private sector was thoughtful, deliberate, and reflective of the same intensity he brought to his military career.

Post-MBA, Byers founded and became CEO of Minerva 6 Group, a service-disabled veteran-owned small business specializing in government contracting, private-sector consulting, and cross-domain technology solutions. His work drew on years spent managing intelligence and technology portfolios at the Pentagon. He also served as COO of Trakr AI, a personal knowledge engine startup, and took on advisory roles with organizations such as the C4 Foundation, the Secure Our Freedom Foundation, and the Navy SEAL Foundation.

Today, Edward C. Byers Jr. remains a "quiet professional" - a leader who continues serving his country by a life dedicated to purpose.

Ty M. Carter

Tough Childhood Leads to Marine and Army Service

Ty Michael Carter entered the world on January 25, 1980, in Spokane, Washington, the son of a young family wandering the western United States. In 1981, the Carters moved to California's Bay Area, where Ty spent his early childhood in a setting very different from the rugged Northwest that would later shape his identity. His parents separated when he was young, and he was raised primarily by his mother, Paula Carter, alongside his siblings. A tragedy later struck when his older brother, Seth, was accidentally killed in a firearm incident - an event that would leave a mark on Ty.

Ty M. Carter *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

When Ty was eleven, his family returned to Spokane with its open spaces and resilient working-class atmosphere. At North Central High School, from which he graduated in 1998, he was not known for his academics. For Ty, the military - specifically the Marine Corps - represented discipline, purpose, and the challenge he craved.

He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps just months after graduation. At Marine Corps Combat Engineer School, he embraced the demands placed upon him. Soon after, he found himself in Okinawa, Japan, serving as an intelligence clerk. Though administrative in nature, the job sharpened his attention to detail. His skill with a rifle earned him a place at Primary Marksmanship Instructor School in 1999, where he learned to refine both his technique and the techniques of others. Deployments to San Clemente Island and Egypt for Operation Bright Star introduced him to the intensity of field operations, preparing him for the combat experiences that lay far ahead.

Honorably discharged from the Marine Corps in 2002, Ty returned to civilian life with mixed feelings. He enrolled at Los Medanos Community College in California, studying biology and trying to find a new identity outside the uniform. He married April Ait, whom he met in college, and they welcomed a daughter, Madison. Yet military service had imprinted itself deeply on Ty's character. The civilian world felt too still, too far removed from the sense of purpose, action and brotherhood he had known. In time, his marriage dissolved, and his search for meaning drew him once again toward the military.

In January 2008, Ty enlisted in the United States Army as a cavalry scout. By April, he was assigned to the 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division - an outfit destined for Afghanistan.

Ty deployed in May 2009 to Nuristan Province, where his unit manned Combat Outpost Keating, an isolated base set deep in a mountainous valley. On October 3, 2009, the outpost came under attack by a massive force of Taliban fighters. The events of that day took on twelve hours of unrelenting combat. Through repeated acts of valor, including crossing open ground under heavy fire to deliver ammunition, rescuing a wounded soldier, recovering a radio, and returning again and again to the fight despite his own wounds, Ty displayed extraordinary courage. His actions helped save the lives of fellow soldiers and contributed to preventing the outpost from being completely overrun.

For his heroism, Carter received the Medal of Honor on August 26, 2013, presented by President Barack Obama.

U.S. President Barack Obama awarding Medal of Honor to Ty Carter *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty: Specialist Ty M. Carter distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Scout with Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan on October 3, 2009. On that morning, Specialist Carter and his comrades awakened to an attack of an estimated 300 enemy fighters occupying the high ground on all four sides of Combat Outpost Keating, employing concentrated fire from recoilless rifles, rocket propelled grenades, anti-aircraft machine guns, mortars and small arms fire. Specialist Carter reinforced a forward battle position, ran twice through a 100-meter gauntlet of enemy fire to resupply ammunition and voluntarily remained there to defend the isolated position. Armed with only an M4 carbine rifle, Specialist Carter placed accurate, deadly fire on the enemy, beating back the assault force and preventing the position from being overrun, over the course of several hours. With complete disregard for his own safety and in spite of his own wounds, he ran through a hail of enemy rocket propelled grenade and machine gun fire to rescue a critically wounded comrade who had been pinned down in an exposed position. Specialist Carter rendered life extending first aid and carried the Soldier to cover. On his own initiative, Specialist Carter again maneuvered through enemy fire to check on a fallen Soldier and recovered the squad's radio, which allowed them to coordinate their evacuation with fellow Soldiers. With teammates providing covering fire, Specialist Carter assisted in moving the wounded Soldier 100 meters through withering enemy fire to the aid station and before returning to the fight. Specialist Carter's heroic actions and tactical skill were critical to the defense of Combat Outpost Keating, preventing the enemy from capturing the position and saving the lives of his fellow Soldiers. Specialist Ty M. Carter's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

The Medal did not define him so much as the unseen cost of the battle. Ty emerged deeply committed to challenging the stigma surrounding post-traumatic stress, speaking openly about his own struggles. He deployed once more to Afghanistan in 2012, and after leaving active duty in 2014 as a Staff Sergeant, he devoted himself to advocacy, education, and service of a different kind.

In his post-military life, Ty remarried, became a father again, and worked as a motivational and veteran-support speaker. He continued his education, explored personal interests like home-brewing and firearms science, and settled into civilian life with a sense of mission that echoed his years in uniform. Today, he stands not only as a decorated soldier but as a voice for resilience, healing, and the enduring strength of those who serve.

Earl D. Plumlee

Oklahoma Oil Fields to National Guard/ Marine/ Army SF Service

Earl D. Plumlee *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Earl D. Plumlee was born on April 6, 1980, in the quiet expanse of western Oklahoma, where the sky stretched wide over cattle fields and the wind carried the dust of the oil-patch. His childhood was shaped by ranch work and the clang of oil-field tools in his family's shop. It was there, among hard labor and harder lessons, that he learned what he would later describe in an interview as "the gravity of your decisions." On a ranch, carelessness could cost a limb. In the oil fields, a mistake could take a life. Long before he put on a uniform, he understood responsibility in a way many adults never do.

In high school, he found an early path toward service, joining the Oklahoma Army National Guard. For a teenager, the thrill of climbing into a tracked vehicle on weekend drills was intoxicating. Yet even then he felt the pull toward something grittier - something closer to the front edge of danger. He wanted, as he later joked, "to be very, very front, sneaking around in the weeds." That desire led him after high school graduation in 2000 to join the Marine Corps.

While forward-deployed in Okinawa, he watched the news of 9/11 unfold. The transformation was immediate and permanent. What had begun as a quest for adventure instantly became, in his words, "a profession of arms in a time of war." It was a pivot that led him deeper into the warrior's path - first as a Recon Marine, and later, after transferring services, as a U.S. Army Special Forces soldier with 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne).

It was with 1st SFG(A) that his defining trial arrived. On August 28, 2013, at Forward Operating Base Ghazni in Afghanistan, a massive explosion tore open a 60-foot breach in the perimeter wall. Ten insurgents wearing Afghan Army uniforms and strapped with suicide vests flooded through the gap. Plumlee and his team raced directly toward the detonation site under a storm of gunfire. When his vehicle came under fire, he used his body to shield his driver, then stepped onto open ground with only a pistol to confront multiple suicide-vest attackers at close range. He killed several insurgents, evacuated a wounded soldier, and continued fighting despite his own injuries - a direct wound to his arm, shrapnel and herniated discs.

The Silver Star originally awarded to him for his actions was later upgraded to the Medal of Honor and awarded it by President Biden on December 16, 2021.

This citation reads:

> Staff Sergeant Earl D. Plumlee distinguished himself by acts of gallantry above and beyond the call of duty on August 28th, 2013, while serving as a weapons sergeant, C Company, 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) in support of Enduring Freedom. Sergeant Plumlee instantly responded to an enemy attack on Forward Operating Base Ghazni - Ghazni Province, Afghanistan - that began with an explosion that tore a 60-foot breach in the base's perimeter wall. Ten insurgents wearing Afghan National Army uniforms and suicide vests poured through the breach. Sergeant Plumlee and five others mounted two vehicles and raced toward the explosion. When his vehicle was engaged by enemy fire, Sergeant Plumlee reacted instinctively, using his body to shield the driver prior to exiting the vehicle and engaging an enemy insurgent 15 meters to the vehicle's right with his pistol. Without cover and in complete disregard for his own safety, he advanced on the enemy, engaging multiple insurgents with only his pistol. Upon reaching cover, he killed two insurgents - one with a grenade and the other by detonating the insurgent's suicide vest using precision sniper fire. Again, disregarding his own safety, Sergeant Plumlee advanced alone against the enemy, engaging several insurgents at close range, including one whose suicide vest exploded a mere seven meters from his position. Under intense enemy fire, Sergeant Plumlee temporarily withdrew to cover, where he joined up with another soldier and, together, they mounted another counterattack. Under fierce enemy fire, Sergeant Plumlee again moved from cover and attacked the enemy forces, advancing within seven meters of a previously wounded insurgent who detonated his suicide vest, blowing Sergeant Plumlee back against a nearby wall. Sergeant Plumlee, ignoring his injuries, quickly regained his faculties and reengaged the enemy forces. Intense enemy fire once again forced the two soldiers to temporarily withdraw. Undeterred, Sergeant Plumlee joined a small group of American and Polish soldiers, who moved from cover to once again counterattack the infiltrators. As the force advanced, Sergeant Plumlee engaged an insurgent to his front left. He then swung around and engaged another insurgent who charged the group from the rear. The insurgent detonated his suicide vest, mortally wounding a U.S. soldier. Sergeant Plumlee, again, with complete disregard for his own safety, ran to the wounded soldier, carried him to safety, and rendered first aid. He then methodically cleared the area, remained in a security posture, and continued to scan for any remaining threats. Staff Sergeant Earl D. Plumlee's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Special Forces Regiment, and the United States Army.

Yet in an interview on Veterans Radio, Plumlee admitted something few recipients would say aloud: he was terrified of wearing it. “It becomes a lifelong quest to be worthy and measure up,” he explained. For him, the Medal was not a coronation but a burden - a symbol representing friends he had buried, year after year, since the war on terror began. “I buried a friend at least once a year since 9/11,” he said quietly. The Medal, in his eyes, belonged as much to them as to him.

After Afghanistan he endured long months of rehabilitation. The herniated discs and damaged arm never fully healed, and even years later they marked the limits of his daily life. Yet the physical pain was never what he talked about most. What haunted him was the responsibility - to his teammates, to the families of the fallen, and to the gold-star children who would one day ask him why their fathers didn’t come home.

Beyond Military Service

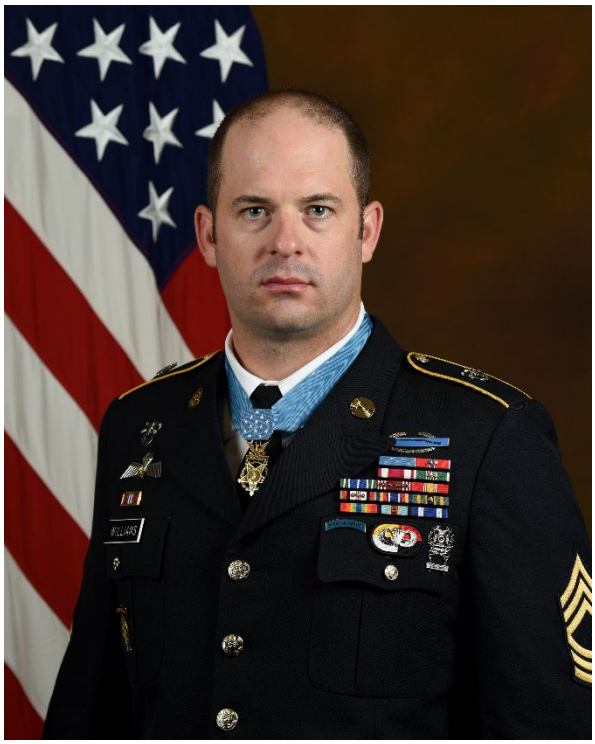
Post-military life brought no retreat into anonymity. Instead, he stepped into a new form of service. He traveled to schools, military academies, and leadership forums, carrying the weight of his story with humility and candor. He spoke openly about faith, recalling how his mother’s prayer circle had sustained him, and how he saw his survival in Afghanistan as something “miraculous.” He talked about leadership on Veterans Radio, offering simple but profound truths: “Everything your guys do well - give them the credit. Everything that goes wrong - that’s your fault.” Young cadets and seasoned officers alike found in him a leader who refused to glamorize war, yet never diminished the honor of serving.

Despite the public appearances, Plumlee remained deeply connected to his roots. Oklahoma was never far from his heart, and his story often circled back to the people and values that shaped him. Even in retirement from active duty, he carried the mindset that had guided him through combat: give everything, blame nothing, and hold yourself to the highest standard possible.

Matthew O. Williams

Texas Bred, Army Fed

Matthew O. Williams was born on October 3, 1981, in Texas, where deeds not words tell the measure of the man. His early childhood unfolded between the Houston area and Boerne, a small town. In Boerne, hard work, accountability, and integrity were requirements. Williams absorbed those lessons.



Matthew O. Williams
(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)

Growing up in Texas meant Friday night football games. At Boerne High School, from which he graduated in 2000, teachers remembered his quiet determination. It was during those early years that he first crossed paths with Kate, the girl who would eventually become his wife. They danced together in elementary school PE - an unremarkable moment at the time that would later soften the edges of a warrior.

After high school, Williams attended Angelo State University, choosing to study criminal justice with a minor in business administration. His ambition was simple. He imagined himself becoming a detective, perhaps working someday for the FBI. Law enforcement appealed to his need for purpose and service, a way to quietly uphold the standards that had shaped him.

But the world changed on September 11, 2001. Over the next few years, as he completed college, the idea of military service grew steadily in his mind. In 2005, he made the decision that would redefine his life. He enlisted in the United States Army under the 18X Special Forces enlistment program.

He completed Infantry One Station Unit Training and Airborne School at Fort Benning before attending Special Forces Assessment and Selection. In 2007, he graduated the Special Forces Qualification Course as an 18B Weapons Sergeant and was assigned to Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne). It was the beginning of a demanding and dangerous career.

On April 6, 2008, in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan's Nuristan Province, Williams would face the defining moment of his military life. During a daring daylight assault on a hillside village

in the Shok Valley, he and his fellow members of Operational Detachment Alpha 3336 came under overwhelming enemy fire. What followed was a six-hour battle against insurgents entrenched in high ground positions, a fight in which Williams repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to evacuate the wounded, coordinate suppressive fire, and help prevent the team from being overrun. His actions that day demonstrated extraordinary valor, leadership, and selflessness.

More than a decade later, he was awarded the medal by President Donald Trump on October 30, 2019.

His citation reads:

> Sergeant Matthew O. Williams distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on April 6, 2008, while serving as a Weapons Sergeant, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 3336, Special Operations Task Force-33, in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Sergeant Williams was part of an assault element inserted by helicopter into a location in Afghanistan. As the assault element was moving up a mountain toward its objective, it was engaged by intense enemy machine gun, sniper, and rocket-propelled grenade fire. The lead portion of the assault element, which included the ground commander, sustained several casualties and became pinned down on the sheer mountainside. Sergeant Williams, upon hearing that the lead element had sustained casualties and was in danger of being overrun, braved intense enemy fire to lead a counter-attack across a valley of ice-covered boulders and a fast-moving, ice cold, and waist-deep river. Under withering fire, Sergeant Williams and his local national commandos fought up the terraced mountainside to the besieged element. Arriving at the lead element's position, Sergeant Williams arrayed his Afghan commandos to provide suppressive fire, which kept the insurgent fighters from overrunning the position. When the Team Sergeant was wounded, Sergeant Williams braved enemy fire once again to provide buddy-aid and to move the Team Sergeant down the sheer mountainside to the casualty collection point. Sergeant Williams then fought and climbed his way back up the mountainside to help defend the lead assault element that still had several serious casualties in need of evacuation. Sergeant Williams directed suppressive fire and exposed himself to enemy fire in order to reestablish the team's critical satellite radio communications. He then assisted with moving the wounded down the near-vertical mountainside to the casualty collection point. Noting that the collection point was about to be overrun by enemy fighters, Sergeant Williams led the Afghan commandos in a counter-attack that lasted for several hours. When helicopters arrived to evacuate the wounded, Sergeant Williams again exposed himself to enemy fire, carrying and loading casualties onto the helicopters while continuing to direct commando firepower to suppress numerous insurgent positions. His actions enabled the patrol

> to evacuate wounded and dead comrades without further casualties. Sergeant Williams' complete disregard for his own safety and his concern for the safety of his teammates ensured the survival of four critically wounded soldiers and prevented the lead element of the assault force from being overrun by the enemy. Sergeant Williams' actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan, Special Operations Command Central, and the United States Army.

Promoted to Sergeant Major in 2020, he continued to serve on active duty, guiding and mentoring the next generation of soldiers.

Beyond Service

Through all of it, his family remained his anchor. He and Kate married and built a life in North Carolina, raising their son, Nolan. Despite the intensity and demands of his service, the values he had learned in Boerne - integrity, humility, hard work - never left him. He carried them into the battlefield and back home again.

Today, Command Sergeant Major Matthew O. Williams continues his service in the U.S. Army, a living testament to the idea that extraordinary heroism is often rooted in ordinary beginnings. His life remains a blend of quiet dedication, professional excellence, and deep devotion to family - a story still being written, shaped by the same values that guided him from the start.

Clint L. Romesha

Farm Chores to Oil Fields

Clint Romesha *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Clinton LaVor Romesha was born on August 17, 1981, in the quiet expanse of Lake City, California. He grew up the fourth of five children in a family where service was not just expected but lived. His grandfather had battled across Europe in World War II, including the crucible of Normandy, and his father, Gary, returned from Vietnam carrying both the weight and dignity of combat experience. "Growing up," Clint recalled on *Veterans Radio*, "I just knew I wanted to serve. The uniform in the family meant something."

Days were filled with farm chores, ice hockey, and the rhythm of a Latter-day Saint household, where he rose early to attend four years of morning seminary before school. At Surprise Valley High School in Cedarville, he was the type of student who didn't draw attention to himself. Clint already knew his path.

Immediately after graduating in 1999, Clint enlisted in the United States Army. His father, initially skeptical of his son joining so young, finally agreed once Clint turned eighteen. The very next day, Clint walked into the recruiter's office. Basic and advanced training at Fort Knox forged him into an armor crewman, first serving as a tank gunner and later rising into leadership as a cavalry scout. Deployments followed: first Kosovo, then Iraq, then Korea, then back to Iraq, and finally Afghanistan. "My own safety didn't even cross my mind," he said later on Veterans Radio. "All that mattered to me was that nobody was left behind."

Nowhere was that loyalty tested more fiercely than on October 3, 2009, at Combat Outpost Keating in Afghanistan's Nuristan Province. When the attack came that morning, it came hard - more than 300 Taliban fighters descended with coordinated, overwhelming fire. "As soon as you heard those rounds come in," Clint recalled, "you just knew it was a whole different ballgame."

What followed would become one of the most intense small-unit battles of the war. Romesha, wounded by shrapnel, repeatedly moved through open ground under fire to rally his soldiers, direct air support, and retake key terrain. He exposed himself time and again to push back the assaulting force. When the enemy threatened to overrun the outpost, he led a small team on a counterattack that ultimately prevented the capture of the camp. He also recovered the remains of fallen soldiers

- an act he describes with quiet emotion, not heroism. “This isn’t about me,” he would later say. “The Medal belongs to each of the guys who fought that day, who stayed.”

He was presented the medal by President Barack Obama on February 11, 2013.

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Section Leader with Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during combat operations against an armed enemy at Combat Outpost Keating, Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan on 3 October 2009. On that morning, Staff Sergeant Romesha and his comrades awakened to an attack by an estimated 300 enemy fighters occupying the high ground on all four sides of the complex, employing concentrated fire from recoilless rifles, rocket propelled grenades, anti-aircraft machine guns, mortars and small arms fire. Staff Sergeant Romesha moved uncovered under intense enemy fire to conduct a reconnaissance of the battlefield and seek reinforcements from the barracks before returning to action with the support of an assistant gunner. Staff Sergeant Romesha took out an enemy machine gun team and, while engaging a second, the generator he was using for cover was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, inflicting him with shrapnel wounds. Undeterred by his injuries, Staff Sergeant Romesha continued to fight and upon the arrival of another soldier to aid him and the assistant gunner, he again rushed through the exposed avenue to assemble additional soldiers. Staff Sergeant Romesha then mobilized a five-man team and returned to the fight equipped with a sniper rifle. With complete disregard for his own safety, Staff Sergeant Romesha continually exposed himself to heavy enemy fire, as he moved confidently about the battlefield engaging and destroying multiple enemy targets, including three Taliban fighters who had breached the combat outpost’s perimeter. While orchestrating a successful plan to secure and reinforce key points of the battlefield, Staff Sergeant Romesha maintained radio communication with the tactical operations center. As the enemy forces attacked with even greater ferocity, unleashing a barrage of rocket-propelled grenades and recoilless rifle rounds, Staff Sergeant Romesha identified the point of attack and directed air support to destroy over 30 enemy fighters. After receiving reports that seriously injured soldiers were at a distant battle position, Staff Sergeant Romesha and his team provided covering fire to allow the injured soldiers to safely reach the aid station. Upon receipt of orders to proceed to the next objective, his team pushed forward 100 meters under overwhelming enemy fire to recover and prevent the enemy fighters from taking the bodies of the fallen comrades. Staff Sergeant Romesha’s heroic actions throughout the day-long battle were critical in suppressing an enemy that had far

> greater numbers. His extraordinary efforts gave Bravo Troop the opportunity to regroup, reorganize and prepare for the counterattack that allowed the Troop to account for its personnel and secure Combat Post Keating. Staff Sergeant Romesha's discipline and extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty reflect great credit upon himself, Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division and the United States Army.

The medal ceremony was not as a personal accolade but as a tribute to the eight soldiers lost at Keating and the others who survived. "I got the call from the Pentagon," he said, "and I sat there for a while and thought, *this isn't about me.*"

Beyond Service

Two years before receiving the nation's highest military award, Clint had already hung up his uniform. He separated from the Army in April 2011 and moved his family - his wife, Tammy, whom he'd married back in 2000, and their children Dessi, Gwen, and Colin - to Minot, North Dakota. There he started anew in the oil industry, working his way from excavation work to field safety specialist. Civilian life offered its own challenges. "Transition is the next fight," he told *Veterans Radio*. "It's different, but it's real."

Clinton L. Romesha *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

In 2016 he published *Red Platoon*, an unflinching memoir that brought readers into the dust, fear, and brotherhood of COP Keating. But beyond the pages of his book, Clint has found renewed purpose as a speaker and advocate, engaging with veteran communities and organizations dedicated to preventing suicide and easing the return to civilian life. "My family had to become strong in new ways," he said. "Service doesn't end when you take the uniform off."

Florent A. Groberg

French Citizen, Track Athlete With Love For This Country

Florent A. Groberg *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Florent Ahmed Groberg was born on May 8, 1983, in Poissy, France, a boy whose life would eventually bridge continents, cultures, and identities. He grew up speaking French, living first in France, then Spain, and back again before his mother married an American named Larry Groberg. This marriage brought young Florent to the United States - an unfamiliar place whose language he did not yet speak. But as he later explained in an interview, "I'm just a guy that came here, I loved this country, I got my chance… and I decided to raise my hand."

Adjusting to American life was not easy. He learned English only around age eleven, but he adapted quickly. He attended Walter Johnson High School in Maryland and ran track. After graduating in 2001, he went on to the University of Maryland, competing in varsity track and earning a degree in criminology and criminal justice. By then, America had become more than a place he lived - it had become the nation he identified with. In 2008, he made the decision that would define his life: he joined the United States Army.

Groberg earned his commission through Officer Candidate School, trained as an infantry officer, and later completed Ranger School. He deployed twice to Afghanistan, first in 2009, then again in 2012. It was during this second deployment, in the rugged and volatile terrain of Kunar Province, that everything changed.

On August 8, 2012, Groberg was leading a personal security detail escorting senior military leaders to a meeting. Amid the dust and bustle of the Afghan street, he saw something that didn't fit - a man walking toward the formation in a strange, deliberate manner. On Veterans Radio he recalled that moment with stark simplicity: "When I saw the guy… I just reacted. I didn't even ask questions."

Instinct and training took over. Groberg rushed the man, pushing him away from the formation. As he did, the man detonated a suicide vest. Another bomber nearby triggered prematurely. The blasts killed four brave Americans - Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin Griffin, Maj. Thomas Kennedy, Air Force Maj. Walter Gray, and ROK Army Sgt. Maj. Lee - but Groberg's actions saved many

others. “My motivation was: protect the boss at all costs. That’s all I knew to do” he told Veterans Radio.

The explosion sent Groberg into darkness. When he regained consciousness, he later said, “my leg was melting, blood everywhere.” He survived, but the blast destroyed nearly half the muscle in his left calf, caused severe nerve damage, ruptured an eardrum, and left him with a traumatic brain injury. His long road of recovery began at Walter Reed, where more than 30 surgeries kept him alive and slowly rebuilt what could be restored.

U.S. Army Sgt. Andrew Mahoney, left, of Laingsburg, Mich., is shown with then-1st Lt. Florent Groberg serving on a personal security detail with the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during a deployment to Regional Command-East *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

What couldn’t be repaired so easily was the emotional toll. “I was angry that I was alive,” he admitted. “I survived, and my brothers didn’t.” Survivor guilt consumed him. However, the world celebrated his bravery.

President Obama awarded him the Medal of Honor in 2015.

His citation reads:

> Captain Florent A. Groberg distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as

> a Personal Security Detachment Commander for Task Force Mountain Warrior, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during combat operations against an armed enemy in Asadbad, Kunar Province, Afghanistan on August 8, 2012. On that day, Captain Groberg was leading a dismounted movement consisting of several senior leaders to include two brigade commanders, two battalion commanders, two command sergeants major, and an Afghanistan National Army brigade commander. As they approached the Provincial Governor's compound, Captain Groberg observed an individual walking close to the formation. When the individual made an abrupt turn towards the formation, he noticed an abnormal bulge underneath the individual's clothing. Selflessly placing himself in front of one of the brigade commanders, Captain Groberg rushed forward, using his body to push the suspect away from the formation. Simultaneously, he ordered another member of the security detail to assist with removing the suspect. At this time, Captain Groberg confirmed the bulge was a suicide vest and with complete disregard for his life, Captain Groberg again with the assistance of the other member of the security detail, physically pushed the suicide bomber away from the formation. Upon falling, the suicide bomber detonated his explosive vest outside the perimeter of the formation, killing four members of the formation and wounding numerous others. The blast from the first suicide bomber caused the suicide vest of a previously unnoticed second suicide bomber to detonate prematurely with minimal impact on the formation. Captain Groberg's immediate actions to push the first suicide bomber away from the formation significantly minimized the impact of the coordinated suicide bombers' attack on the formation, saving the lives of his comrades and several senior leaders. Captain Groberg's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty at the risk of life are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect credit upon himself, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division and the United States Army.

Groberg wrestled with the burden of that recognition. "The Medal doesn't belong to me," he often said. "I'm just the courier." In his view, the Medal symbolized the sacrifice of the men who died, not the heroism others attributed to him.

Beyond the Uniform

Recovery - physical, emotional, and spiritual - was its own battlefield. He called it was his "dark period," a time when he questioned his worth, his purpose, and why he alone had been given what he called "a second chance at life." But slowly, through the support of fellow wounded warriors, family, and a renewed personal mission, he found clarity. "I had to find something to latch on to that gave me purpose again," he recalled.

He built that purpose in service - speaking publicly about leadership, mental health, and resilience. He returned to school, earning a master's degree, and began working in public service roles, supporting defense and veteran causes. He committed himself to showing others that recovery was possible, especially those who felt lost or forgotten. "I want to figure out a way… to go out there all day, every day, and say: 'We can get out of here. We can do this.'"

Today, Florent Groberg's story is more than a tale of battlefield courage. It is the story of an immigrant who chose America, a soldier who chose selfless action, and a man who chose to rebuild himself so he could help others do the same. His journey reminds us that heroism does not end with a single act - it continues, quietly and steadily, in the hard work of healing, honoring the fallen, and finding purpose again.

Thomas P. Payne

Family Tradition & Down But Not Out

Thomas Patrick Payne was born on April 2, 1984, in the quiet stretches of South Carolina. Raised in the towns of Batesburg-Leesville and Lugoff, Payne grew up in a household anchored by public service. His father worked in law enforcement in Richland County, a profession that exposed young Tom to a clear understanding of responsibility and sacrifice. His family's connection to military and public service stretched back generations - his grandfather served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam - creating a lineage that subtly, yet powerfully, pulled him toward a life of uniformed service.

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Thomas P. Payne *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Growing up as one of three brothers, Payne was surrounded by a competitive yet deeply supportive family. One brother would eventually join the U.S. Army, and another the Air Force. But it was the national tragedy of September 11, 2001, that became the defining turning point in his young life.

Payne graduated high school in 2002 with a clear sense of purpose. He had tried to join the Marine Corps at age 17, but his mother refused to sign the waiver. The moment he graduated, he enlisted in the U.S. Army on July 25, 2002. Soon after, he shipped off to Fort Benning, where he completed Infantry One-Station Unit Training, followed by the Basic Airborne Course and the Ranger Indoctrination Program. His selection to the elite 75th Ranger Regiment was the beginning of his transformation from a determined young man into a highly trained special operations warrior.

Assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Payne quickly excelled. He served in roles ranging from rifleman to sniper, and eventually sniper team leader, deploying multiple times in support of the Global War on Terror.

In 2010, during a deployment to Afghanistan, he was wounded by a grenade blast - a moment that nearly ended his career. Instead, it propelled him into the next phase of his life.

In 2012, he and a teammate won the Army's Best Ranger Competition - one of the most grueling athletic and tactical events in the military. Later that year, he was selected for service in the U.S.

Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, joining one of the most elite counterterrorism units in the world. Over his career, he deployed seventeen times across multiple theaters including Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa, and other undisclosed locations.

It was on October 22, 2015, in Kurkik Providence, Iraq, that Payne performed the actions that would earn him the Medal of Honor. During a night raid to rescue more than 70 hostages from ISIS captivity, his team encountered overwhelming fire, collapsing buildings, explosions, and a rapidly worsening inferno. Payne repeatedly re-entered a burning prison building - despite the roof beginning to fail - cutting locks with bolt cutters, evacuating prisoners, and refusing to leave until the last hostage was safe.

He was awarded the medal by President Donald Trump on September 11, 2020, becoming the first living Delta Force operator to receive the medal.

His citation reads:

> Sergeant First Class Thomas P. Payne distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, above and beyond the call of duty, on October 22, 2015, during a daring nighttime hostage rescue in Kirkuk Province, Iraq, in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Sergeant Payne led a combined assault team charged with clearing one of two buildings known to house the hostages. With speed, audacity, and courage, he led his team as they quickly cleared the assigned building, liberating 38 hostages. Upon hearing a request for additional assaulters to assist with clearing the other building, Sergeant Payne, on his own initiative, left his secured position, exposing himself to enemy fire as he bounded across the compound to the other building from which entrenched enemy forces were engaging his comrades. Sergeant Payne climbed a ladder to the building's roof, which was partially engulfed in flames, and engaged enemy fighters below with grenades and small arms fire. He then moved back to ground level to engage the enemy forces through a breach hole in the west side of the building. Knowing time was running out for the hostages trapped inside the burning building, Sergeant Payne moved to the main entrance, where heavy enemy fire had thwarted previous attempts to enter. He knowingly risked his own life by bravely entering the building under intense enemy fire, enduring smoke, heat, and flames to identify the armored door imprisoning the hostages. Upon exiting, Sergeant Payne exchanged his rifle for bolt cutters, and again entered the building, ignoring the enemy rounds impacting the walls around him as he cut the locks on a complex locking mechanism. His courageous actions motivated the coalition assault team members to enter the breach and assist with cutting the locks. After exiting to catch his breath, he reentered the building to make the final lock cuts, freeing 37 hostages. Sergeant Payne then facilitated the evacuation of the hostages, even though ordered

to evacuate the collapsing building himself, which was now structurally unsound due to the fire. Sergeant Payne then reentered the burning building one last time to ensure everyone had been evacuated. He consciously exposed himself to enemy automatic gunfire each time he entered the building. His extraordinary heroism and selfless actions were key to liberating 75 hostages during a contested rescue mission that resulted in 20 enemies killed in action. Sergeant First Class Payne's gallantry under fire and uncommon valor are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the United States Special Operations Command, and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

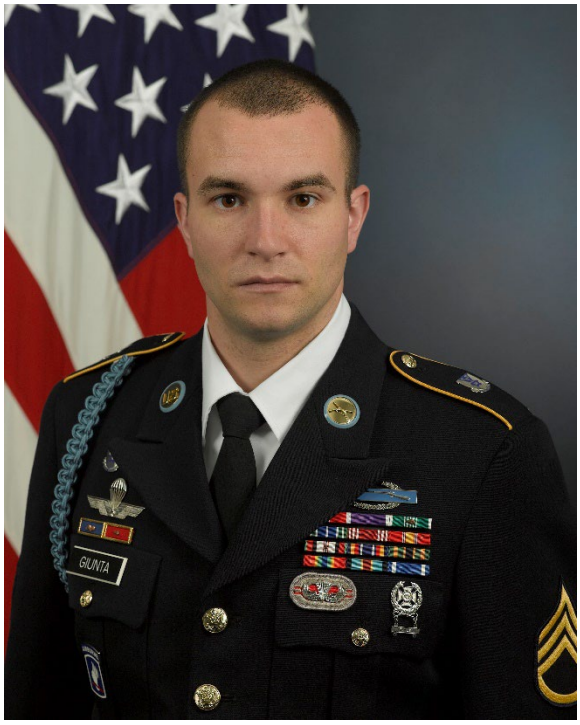
Even with national recognition, Payne remained humble and committed to service. While still on active duty, he pursued education, earning a Bachelor of Science in Strategic Studies and Defense Analysis from Norwich University in 2017, studying during deployments and downtime. As of 2024–2025, he continues serving on active duty at Fort Bragg within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. His current duties - part instructor, part senior enlisted advisor, part strategic planner - reflect both the wisdom of his experience and the discretion required of his unit's classified mission sets.

During his 2010 recovery at Lake Murray, South Carolina, he met Alison, the woman who would become his wife. A dedicated nurse, she would later work on the front lines during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak. The couple eventually had three children, and Payne often described his family as his grounding force through the intensity of military life.

For Payne, service is not past tense. As he once said, "I love my job. I still have a passion for service, and it burns bright." His life - marked by courage, devotion to family, and quiet professionalism - serves as a testament to what defines America's most elite warriors.

Salvatore A. Giunta

Wandering Looking for Purpose to a Loyal Man



Salvatore A. Giunta *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Salvatore Augustine Giunta was born on January 21, 1985, in the industrial heart of Clinton, Iowa, and raised in nearby Cedar Rapids. The oldest of three children, he grew up surrounded by the steady rhythm of Midwestern life - schools that took pride in community, parents who valued hard work, and neighborhoods where responsibility was learned early. Military historian Dwight Jon Zimmerman often emphasizes how these foundations shaped Giunta long before he ever wore a uniform. The boy who spent his summers biking, snowboarding, and exploring the woods was, Zimmerman suggests, unknowingly training the instincts that would one day save lives in a faraway valley.

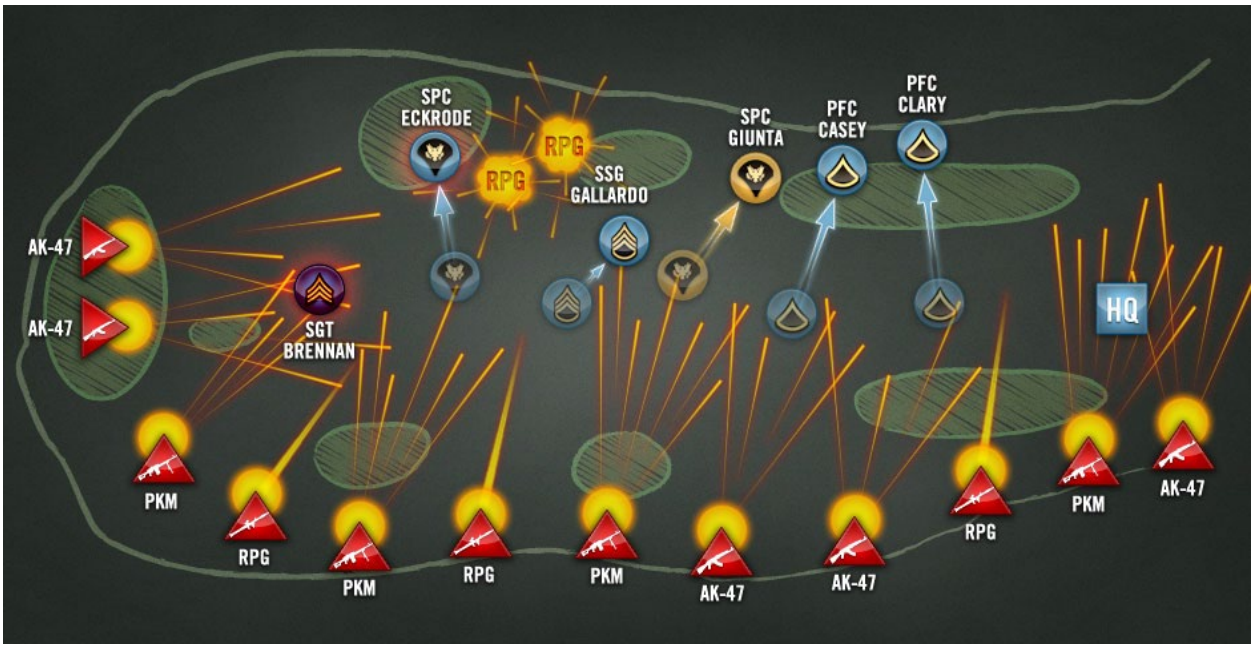
At John F. Kennedy High School, Giunta was an ordinary teenager - laid-back, good-natured, always ready with a joke, and far more interested in friends than in class rankings. He worked at regional low wage service jobs. These early roles - sandwich maker, stocker, clerk - were unsung but instructive. They taught him how to show up on time, work with others, and handle stress without panic.

After graduating in 2003, Giunta didn't head for college. Instead, he moved through entry-level jobs, feeling a growing sense that he needed more purpose than his routine offered. Zimmerman describes this as a period of "wandering direction," a search for meaning common to many young Americans after high school. One night, on his way home from work, Giunta saw an Army recruiter giving a pitch in a local mall. Curious, and perhaps hungry for direction, he stopped to listen. The recruiter's message - about challenge, purpose, and belonging - stuck with him. Weeks later, Giunta enlisted in the United States Army.

He completed basic training, Airborne school, and was assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team in Vicenza, Italy. Zimmerman notes that this unit, famous for its cohesion and combat history, accelerated Giunta's transformation from an uncertain teenager into a confident soldier. Surrounded by high-performing paratroopers, he learned to push his limits, embrace discipline, and trust the men on his left and right.

Giunta deployed twice to Afghanistan, the second time into the notorious Korengal Valley, known as "The Valley of Death." Zimmerman highlights the immense pressure these soldiers lived under: constant ambushes, steep terrain, and an enemy that seemed to know every ridge. Giunta served as a rifle team leader, responsible not only for mission success but for the lives of his teammates. It was a responsibility he carried with fierce loyalty.

On the night of October 25, 2007, during Operation Rock Avalanche, that loyalty would be tested. Giunta's squad was moving along a narrow trail when insurgents unleashed a complex, perfectly timed ambush. Bullets sliced through the darkness. Men were hit within seconds. Giunta reacted without hesitation. Giunta dragged a wounded soldier to safety, then advanced through a storm of gunfire toward two insurgents who were attempting to carry off his friend, Sgt. Joshua Brennan. Giunta charged forward, killed one insurgent, wounded the other, and pulled Brennan back to friendly lines. His actions prevented a kidnapping and saved lives.



Giunta MOH narrative slide 3.jpg *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

President Barack Obama awarded him the Medal of Honor on November 16, 2010.

His citation reads:

> Specialist Salvatore A. Giunta distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with an armed enemy in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan, on October 25, 2007. While conducting a patrol as team leader with Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, Specialist Giunta and his team were navigating through harsh terrain when they were ambushed by a well-armed and well-coordinated insurgent

> force. While under heavy enemy fire, Specialist Giunta immediately sprinted towards cover and engaged the enemy. Seeing that his squad leader had fallen and believing that he had been injured, Specialist Giunta exposed himself to withering enemy fire and raced towards his squad leader, helped him to cover, and administered medical aid. While administering first aid, enemy fire struck Specialist Giunta's body armor and his secondary weapon. Without regard to the ongoing fire, Specialist Giunta engaged the enemy before prepping and throwing grenades, using the explosions for cover in order to conceal his position. Attempting to reach additional wounded fellow soldiers who were separated from the squad, Specialist Giunta and his team encountered a barrage of enemy fire that forced them to the ground. The team continued forward and upon reaching the wounded soldiers, Specialist Giunta realized that another soldier was still separated from the element. Specialist Giunta then advanced forward on his own initiative. As he crested the top of a hill, he observed two insurgents carrying away an American soldier. He immediately engaged the enemy, killing one and wounding the other. Upon reaching the wounded soldier, he began to provide medical aid, as his squad caught up and provided security. Specialist Giunta's unwavering courage, selflessness, and decisive leadership while under extreme enemy fire were integral to his platoon's ability to defeat an enemy ambush and recover a fellow American soldier from the enemy. Specialist Salvatore A. Giunta's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, and the United States Army.

Yet Giunta never saw himself as a hero. He insisted that the medal belonged not to him, but to the team, and especially to Brennan and Specialist Hugo Mendoza, who died that night. For Giunta, heroism was not about glory - it was about loyalty.

Beyond Service

After leaving the Army in 2011, Giunta sought a quieter life. He married Jenna, whom he had met in Italy, and together they built a family, raising two children while carving out a private, steady civilian life. Giunta became a speaker, advocate for veterans, and author of the memoir *Living with Honor*. But even in public roles, he remained grounded, choosing humility over fame.

Ryan M. Pitts

New England Boy to Technology Field

Ryan Michael Pitts was born on October 1, 1985, in Lowell, Massachusetts, a mill town known for its grit and hardworking families. His early childhood unfolded across the quiet woods and winding roads of southern New Hampshire. Boys grew up outdoors - running fields, climbing trees, and dreaming big. For Ryan, one dream stood above the rest. Even as a kindergartner, he told adults he wanted to be a soldier. It was more than the heroic imagery or the uniform; something deeper seemed to resonate in him even from an early age.

Ryan M. Pitts *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

At Souhegan High School in Amherst, where he graduated in 2003, he was known as thoughtful, determined, and quiet. College was an option but a financial burden. The Army offered not just structure and opportunity, but purpose. At age seventeen, with his mother's signature, Ryan enlisted through the delayed-entry program.

Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, transformed him from a determined youth into a disciplined soldier. There he learned the skills of a forward observer - 13F - where precision, calm under pressure, and quick calculation were essential. Airborne School at Fort Benning followed, where he earned his wings and joined the proud tradition of paratroopers. Shortly after, he was assigned to the storied 173rd Airborne Brigade, first with the 4th Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment in Italy, and later with the 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment. It was with these men that he would forge the bonds that would carry him through the hardest days of his life.

Afghanistan tested him early and often. His first deployment in 2005 carried him into the rugged mountains and isolated villages of the country's eastern reaches. He learned quickly that the enemy was as unforgiving as the terrain. A second deployment in 2007 thrust him into the heart of the embattled Kunar and Nuristan provinces, where Taliban and insurgent activity surged.

His ultimate test would be on July 13, 2008, during the Battle of Wanat. At Observation Post Topside, overlooking Vehicle Patrol Base Kahler, Ryan and eight fellow paratroopers faced a massive and coordinated attack. Waves of insurgents descended on their position from the

surrounding high ground. Early in the battle, Ryan sustained severe shrapnel wounds from grenades that tore into his legs and arms. Bleeding, barely able to stand, he crawled between fighting positions, hurling grenades, firing when he could, and relaying critical radio information that helped prevent the enemy from overrunning the base. His determination, even in the face of near-collapse, helped save lives. But the cost was immense. Several of his brothers in arms fell that day - men Ryan would forever carry with him.

He was awarded the medal by President Barack Obama on July 21, 2014.

Pitts receiving the Medal of Honor from President Obama *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

His citation reads:

> Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts distinguished himself by extraordinary acts of heroism at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Forward Observer in 2d Platoon, Chosen Company, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade during combat operations against an armed enemy at Vehicle Patrol Base Kahler in the vicinity of Wanat Village, Kunar Province, Afghanistan on July 13, 2008. Early that morning, while Sergeant Pitts was providing perimeter security at Observation Post Topside, a well-organized Anti-Afghan Force consisting of over 200 members initiated a close proximity

sustained and complex assault using accurate and intense rocket-propelled grenade, machine gun and small arms fire on Wanat Vehicle Patrol Base. An immediate wave of rocket-propelled grenade rounds engulfed the Observation Post wounding Sergeant Pitts and inflicting heavy casualties. Sergeant Pitts had been knocked to the ground and was bleeding heavily from shrapnel wounds to his arm and legs, but with incredible toughness and resolve, he subsequently took control of the Observation Post and returned fire on the enemy. As the enemy drew nearer, Sergeant Pitts threw grenades, holding them after the pin was pulled and the safety lever was released to allow a nearly immediate detonation on the hostile forces. Unable to stand on his own and near death because of the severity of his wounds and blood loss, Sergeant Pitts continued to lay suppressive fire until a two-man reinforcement team arrived. Sergeant Pitts quickly assisted them by giving up his main weapon and gathering ammunition all while continually lobbing fragmentary grenades until these were expended. At this point, Sergeant Pitts crawled to the northern position radio and described the situation to the Command Post as the enemy continued to try and isolate the Observation Post from the main Patrol Base. With the enemy close enough for him to hear their voices and with total disregard for his own life, Sergeant Pitts whispered in the radio situation reports and conveyed information that the Command Post used to provide indirect fire support. Sergeant Pitts' courage, steadfast commitment to the defense of his unit and ability to fight while seriously wounded prevented the enemy from overrunning the Observation Post and capturing fallen American soldiers, and ultimately prevented the enemy from gaining fortified positions on higher ground from which to attack Wanat Vehicle Patrol Base. Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts' extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

Medically discharged in 2009 and awarded the Medal of Honor in 2014, Ryan never viewed the distinction as his alone. In his mind, it belonged to the men of Topside, especially those who did not return. His life after the military reflects the same humility and steadiness that defined his service.

He returned to New Hampshire, pursued a business degree at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester, and transitioned into civilian work in the technology industry. He married Amy, and together they built a quiet family life in Nashua with their son, Lucas.

Though he no longer wears the uniform, Ryan Pitts continues to serve - through leadership talks, veteran advocacy, and a steadfast commitment to honoring the memory of those who fell beside him. His journey from a quiet New England boy to a decorated soldier stands not as a tale of glory, but of love - for his brothers, his family, and his country.

Kyle J. White

Firefights to the Financial World

Sgt. Kyle J. White in March 2014 *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

Kyle Jerome White entered the world on March 27, 1987, in the greater Seattle region, the son of Curt and Cheryl White. His father, Curt, a veteran of the U.S. Army Special Forces, carried with him the habits and expectations of a man who had learned life-defining lessons in uniform. Though he did not impose military service on his son, the example he set left a lasting imprint on Kyle long before the idea of enlistment would cross his mind.

Growing up in the community of Bonney Lake, Kyle experienced a childhood typical of small-town America but defined by an emerging inner grit. Like many teenagers in Bonney Lake, he passed through high school with a mix of uncertainty and determination. Though specific details of his high-school experience remain elusive in public records, what is clear - particularly through the lens of Dwight Jon Zimmerman's approach to biography - is that this period laid the groundwork for his later resolve. Zimmerman emphasizes how Medal of Honor recipients often share common threads in adolescence: the early signs of responsibility, the navigation of personal challenges, and the development of a moral compass forged in ordinary moments long before the extraordinary ones.

Upon graduating high school, Kyle made a decision that would change the course of his life: he enlisted in the United States Army. On February 15, 2006, he reported for Basic Training at Fort Benning, Georgia. What began as a leap into adulthood quickly became a calling. He completed Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training, and Airborne School in the same location, proving himself both physically capable and emotionally ready for the demanding path he had chosen.

Following training, White was assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, based in Vicenza, Italy. In the spring of 2007 he deployed to Afghanistan, serving as a platoon radio-telephone operator in the steep, unforgiving mountains of Nuristan Province. It was there, on November 9, 2007, that his quiet resolve became a lifeline for

others. During a deadly ambush as his platoon returned from a shura with village elders in Aranas, Kyle was knocked unconscious by an RPG blast, suffered shrapnel to the face, and awoke to chaos. Yet through the firestorm, he moved with determination - administering aid, coordinating radio communications essential to survival, and refusing evacuation until the wounded were secured. His bravery on that mountainside earned him the Medal of Honor in 2014.

He was awarded the medal by President Barack Obama on May 13, 2014.

White receiving the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

His citation reads:

> Specialist Kyle J. White distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a radio telephone operator with Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade, during combat operations against an armed enemy in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan on November 9, 2007. On that day,

Specialist White and his comrades were returning to Bella Outpost from a shura with Aranas Village elders. As the soldiers traversed a narrow path surrounded by mountainous, rocky terrain, they were ambushed by enemy forces from elevated positions. Pinned against a steep mountain face, Specialist White and his fellow soldiers were completely exposed to enemy fire. Specialist White returned fire and was briefly knocked unconscious when a rocket-propelled grenade impacted near him. When he regained consciousness, another round impacted near him, embedding small pieces of shrapnel in his face. Shaking off his wounds, Specialist White noticed one of his comrades lying wounded nearby. Without hesitation, Specialist White exposed himself to enemy fire in order to reach the soldier and provide medical aid. After applying a tourniquet, Specialist White moved to an injured Marine, similarly providing aid and comfort until the Marine succumbed to his wounds. Specialist White then returned to the soldier and discovered that he had been wounded again. Applying his own belt as an additional tourniquet, Specialist White was able to stem the flow of blood and save the soldier's life. Noticing that his and the other soldier's radios were inoperative, Specialist White exposed himself to enemy fire yet again in order to secure a radio from a deceased comrade. He then provided information and updates to friendly forces, allowing precision airstrikes to stifle the enemy's attack and ultimately permitting medical evacuation aircraft to rescue him, his fellow soldiers, Marines and Afghan Army soldiers. Specialist Kyle J. White's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade and the United States Army.

Beyond Service

After the war, Kyle White served with the 4th Ranger Training Battalion before leaving active duty in 2011 as a Sergeant. Transitioning to civilian life, he enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where he earned a degree in finance. He built a career in the financial sector, first with the Royal Bank of Canada and later with Bank of America Merrill Lynch, demonstrating the same calm precision that had once guided him under fire.

He also confronted the invisible wounds of war, speaking openly about post-traumatic stress and the difficult journey from combat to peace. Kyle J. White's story - rooted in family, shaped in adolescence, tested in war, and redefined in civilian life - is one of steadfast courage. It is the story of a quiet boy from Washington who became a soldier, a survivor, a leader, and ultimately, a symbol of extraordinary valor born from an ordinary American life.

Dakota L. Meyer

High School Football Star to Transitional Struggles

Dakota Louis Meyer was born on June 26, 1988, in the small Kentucky town of Columbia, surrounded by the rolling hills and quiet farmland of Green County. His early life was shaped by chores, livestock, and work that demanded sweat more than words. On his father's farm, accountability wasn't abstract - it was lived. Dakota would later say, "My dad held me accountable. He taught me what a work ethic was… you better live up to it every single day."

U.S. Marine Sgt. Dakota L. Meyer *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

In high school, Dakota was a football player with raw athleticism and dreams of playing at the college level. His days centered on practice, the weight room, and the camaraderie of teammates. But the plans he thought he'd follow changed the day a Marine recruiter visited Green County High School. Meyer recalled being challenged - almost dared - to consider a path of greater consequence. That challenge stuck. The idea of service, of earning something rather than being given it, resonated deeply. As he would later put it: "Titles are earned, they're not given."

Upon graduating in 2006, Meyer enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. He completed boot camp at Parris Island, advanced through infantry and sniper training, and deployed first to Iraq in 2007. His second deployment came in 2009 to Afghanistan, assigned to Embedded Training Team 2-8 in Kunar Province. It was there, in the steep, terraced valley near the village of Ganjgal, that Meyer's life - and history - turned.

On the morning of September 8, 2009, Afghan and American forces walked into a deadly ambush. Meyer repeatedly asked for permission to enter the fight and was denied. Eventually, he went anyway. Across hours of combat, he made multiple trips into the valley, under fire from rifles, RPGs, and machine guns, evacuating wounded Afghan soldiers and searching for missing teammates. He recovered the bodies of four fallen Americans. For those actions, he would receive the Medal of Honor two years later.

He was awarded the medal by President Barack Obama on September 15, 2011.

His citation reads:

> Corporal Meyer maintained security at a patrol rally point while other members of his team moved on foot with two platoons of Afghan National Army and Border Police into the village of Ganjgal for a pre-dawn meeting with village elders. Moving into the village, the patrol was ambushed by more than 50 enemy fighters firing rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and machine guns from houses and fortified positions on the slopes above. Hearing over the radio that four U.S. team members were cut off, Corporal Meyer seized the initiative. With a fellow Marine driving, Corporal Meyer took the exposed gunner's position in a gun-truck as they drove down the steeply terraced terrain in a daring attempt to disrupt the enemy attack and locate the trapped U.S. team. Disregarding intense enemy fire now concentrated on their lone vehicle, Corporal Meyer killed a number of enemy fighters with the mounted machine guns and his rifle, some at near point blank range, as he and his driver made three solo trips into the ambush area. During the first two trips, he and his driver evacuated two dozen Afghan soldiers, many of whom were wounded. When one machine gun became inoperable, he directed a return to the rally point to switch to another gun-truck for a third trip into the ambush area where his accurate fire directly supported the remaining U.S. personnel and Afghan soldiers fighting their way out of the ambush. Despite a shrapnel wound to his arm, Corporal Meyer made two more trips into the ambush area in a third gun-truck accompanied by four other Afghan vehicles to recover more wounded Afghan soldiers and search for the missing U.S. team members. Still under heavy enemy fire, he dismounted the vehicle on the fifth trip and moved on foot to locate and recover the bodies of his team members. Corporal Meyer's daring initiative and bold fighting spirit throughout the 6-hour battle significantly disrupted the enemy's attack and inspired the members of the combined force to fight on. His unwavering courage and steadfast devotion to his U.S. and Afghan comrades in the face of almost certain death reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Beyond Service

But Meyer did not bask in the title. In interviews - including his conversation on Veterans Radio - he rejected the idea of heroism: "If I was a hero, I would have brought them out alive that day. That's a hero. I was just doing my job." The world saw extraordinary valor. However, Meyer felt heartbreak, responsibility, and the weight of survival.

Leaving active duty in 2010, Dakota entered the difficult terrain of civilian transition. He struggled with PTSD, depression, and the dissolution of his marriage. He described this era bluntly: *"*I was victimizing. I walked in late. I wasn't showing up. I wasn't being the man I needed to be." The turning point came in a simple conversation with a mentor, who told him: "You can either take the pain in, get through it, learn from it, and help others with it - or you'll pass it on." That moment reshaped his trajectory.

Fatherhood became another anchor. Speaking of his daughter Sailor, Meyer said, "She changed the trajectory of it… I needed to be the man she deserved, not the one I was being." The message of responsibility - of finishing what you start - rekindled the discipline he had learned on the farm and in the Marines.

In the years that followed, Meyer turned outward. He became a firefighter, an EMT, a veterans' advocate, and a sought-after speaker. His public voice emphasized service, hope, and resilience. "The world needs hope right now," he said in one interview. "The reality of today isn't the reality of forever."

This renewed sense of mission found expression in entrepreneurship. Meyer launched new ventures including Dash Hydrate, a performance hydration company built on values of discipline, health, and readiness. For him, business was not a departure from service - it was an extension of it. He approached entrepreneurship with the same ethos he brought to combat: act decisively, do it for others, and finish what you begin. His speaking career, bestselling books such as *Into the Fire* and *The Way Forward*, and his advocacy became interconnected parts of his post-military identity - a platform to remind others that adversity can transform rather than destroy.

Today, Dakota Meyer's life reflects a continuum rather than separate chapters. From the farm to the football field, from Ganjgal to fatherhood, from turmoil to entrepreneurship - each stage echoes the lessons he continues to share: that legacy is built through action, that hope is a duty, and that service doesn't end when the uniform comes off.

William Kyle Carpenter

You Are Worth It!

Kyle J. Carpenter *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

William Kyle Carpenter entered the world on October 17, 1989, in Jackson, Mississippi, the kind of child whose boundless energy made it clear he was made for motion. Growing up, his days were filled with sports, adventure, and the type of hard-earned lessons that come from constantly pushing one's limits. Years later, during his interview on *Veterans Radio*, Kyle would reflect that all that movement - new schools, new friends, new routines - quietly taught him adaptability. Without realizing it, he was preparing himself for a life where abrupt change would become the norm and where resilience would become survival.

When his family relocated to South Carolina, Kyle entered high school with the same drive that had defined his youth. At Wyman King Academy, he found his place on the football field, playing running back with intensity that coaches admired. High school athletics gave Kyle more than victories; it taught him discipline, teamwork, and an early understanding that sometimes you train not for yourself but for the person next to you. Years later he would recall that lesson often, recognizing how deeply those early experiences shaped the Marine he would become.

After graduating in 2008, Kyle enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. He completed recruit training at Parris Island and further honed skills at Camp Geiger before joining Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines. There, among the men he would later call his second family, he discovered a sense of purpose deeper than anything he had known before. "We all raised our hand and entered into a life of service," he said in the Veterans Radio interview, "a life of the unknown." The unknown arrived on November 21, 2010.

On a rooftop in Marjah, Afghanistan, Lance Corporal Carpenter and a fellow Marine stood watch over a volatile district scarred by insurgent activity. In the split second it took an enemy grenade to arc into their sandbagged position, Kyle made a decision that would forever alter the course of

his life. He moved toward the grenade, shielding his friend from the blast. As he told Veterans Radio, he “cuddled the grenade”. The explosion was devastating. Kyle’s body was shattered - his jaw and right arm broken, his right eye destroyed, his lungs collapsed. His heart stopped several times as medics worked to save him. He was twenty-one.

Recovery became his next battlefield. For nearly three years at Walter Reed, he endured more than forty surgeries - rebuilding his face, repairing his bones, reclaiming his breath. Through it all, his family stood at his side, especially his mother, whose presence became a source of strength he would later describe with deep gratitude. “Call your mom,” he often says now, not as a casual reminder but as a testament to the people who carry us when we cannot carry ourselves.

Kyle was medically retired from the Marine Corps in 2013. One year later, he stood in the East Room of the White House as President Barack Obama placed the Medal of Honor around his neck.

Carpenter receiving the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama *(via Wikimedia Commons, Public domain)*

His citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as an Automatic Rifleman with Company F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 1, 1st Marine Division (Forward), 1 Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), in Helmand Province, Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom on 21 November 2010. Lance Corporal Carpenter was a member of a platoon-sized coalition force, comprised of two reinforced Marine squads partnered with an Afghan National Army squad. The platoon had established Patrol Base Dakota two days earlier in a small village in the Marjah District in order to disrupt enemy activity and provide security for the local Afghan population. Lance Corporal Carpenter and a fellow Marine were manning a rooftop security position on the perimeter of Patrol Base Dakota when the enemy initiated a daylight attack with hand grenades, one of which landed inside their sandbagged position. Without hesitation, and with complete disregard for his own safety, Lance Corporal Carpenter moved toward the grenade in an attempt to shield his fellow Marine from the deadly blast. When the grenade detonated, his body absorbed the brunt of the blast, severely wounding him, but saving the life of his fellow Marine. By his undaunted courage, bold fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of almost certain death, Lance Corporal Carpenter reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Beyond Service

But to Kyle, the medal was never about him. “It’s a difficult Medal to wear,” he admitted on Veterans Radio, “because it represents sacrifice - our country’s history, the people who gave life and limb.” The ribbon, he believed, honored not just what happened on that rooftop but what every service member risks when they raise their right hand.

Life after the Medal was not an ending but a beginning. Kyle set ambitious goals: run a marathon, return to college and rediscover adventure. He earned his degree in International Studies from the University of South Carolina, joined a fraternity, and stepped into the world of public speaking. His message was clear - your scars are not symbols of defeat; they are proof of what you’ve survived. “Don’t hide your scars,” he often tells audiences. “They’re part of your story.”

In 2019 he published *You Are Worth It: Building a Life Worth Fighting For*, a book that distilled his philosophies into simple, powerful principles. One of them echoed his own journey: healing happens one small step at a time.

Today, Kyle Carpenter continues to serve - not in uniform, but in mission. He travels the country sharing his story, advocating for veterans, and reminding people that courage is not defined by a single moment but by the way you choose to live after your life has been irrevocably changed.

His scars speak - and through them, so does he.

VETERAN RADIO TRANSCRIPTS

VeteransRadio.org has been on air (terrestrial and also now internet) since 2003. Its hosts have spoken to Medal of Honor recipients, authors and friends of recipients. This book is only focused on the living. However, you will find Veteran Radio podcasts and archived programs about those Medal Recipients that are no longer alive or controversies that still swirl (like medals for Battle of Little Big Horn).

I have included a transcript discussing the history of the Medal of Honor. The modern medal is nothing like its roots. Historian Doug Mears discusses that history along with why medals were removed from some recipients and about the reviews to ensure that minority recipients were not overlooked.

Medal of Honor recipients never promote their own heroism or case for the medal. It takes a lot of interested people to pull the package together, supported by affidavits, video, animations, etc. I have included two transcripts to give you that flavor of the efforts of these individuals, sherpas who carry a heavy load up a step mountain. Paris Davis and Ken David are recent recipients and I spoke with their sherpas.

THE HISTORY OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

Dwight S. Mears

(July 16, 2019)

Fausone: We want to welcome back to Veterans Radio, Dwight S. Mears. Dwight is a retired Army major. He was commissioned after going to West Point as an aviation background.

But along the way, he picked up his PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a JD from Lewis and Clark Law School, and is working on his master's in library science. Dwight, welcome back to Veterans Radio.

Mears: Thank you for having me.

Fausone: Well, when we were on last, and folks can find this interview as well on our website at veteransradio.org in the podcast, we talked about internment of U.S. Airmen in Switzerland. But you've also done a lot of research and writing on the evolution of the Medal of Honor. And I thought it would be very interesting to have some discussion about that.

Let's start with, as an Army major, how did you get yourself interested in the history of the Medal of Honor?

Mears: Well, it stemmed from my earlier research that I talked to you about last time with the Prisoner of War Medal. And because we effectively had no other service or valor medals until World War I, if you want to understand the statutory and to an extent policy history of other medals or provisions that are borrowed, you have to go to the granddaddy of all medals, which is the Medal of Honor.

And valor awards in particular are tied to combat. And because the award that I was interested in was also a combat prerequisite award, the Prisoner of War Medal, I had to understand where the language came from in that medal in order to understand the combat thresholds, which were prerequisites before you could even be considered for a combat medal. You had to satisfy those legal criteria.

Fausone: Well, before we get into some of the predecessors to the Medal of Honor, let me try to have you explain to our Veterans Radio listeners, because we get this question all the time. Is it the Congressional Medal of Honor or the Presidential Medal of Honor?

Mears: It's just the Medal of Honor. There is a misperception that it's called the Congressional Medal of Honor. And that certainly is a colloquialism that's out there.

However, the authorizing statutes from the Civil War and just about every statute subsequent to that, all use, “authorize a Medal of Honor in the name of Congress.” And so really, because the executive, in this case, the president now awards the medal. And before the turn of the century, it was just the Navy or the War Department that awarded it.

It really isn't the Congressional Medal of Honor. However, like any other law, Congress merely controls the criteria. They do not control the adjudication of the medal, so it would be a mistake to say that it's actually awarded by Congress in the same way as a Congressional Gold Medal, for example, which is actually awarded by Congress.

Fausone: And now we go back in time. There were a number of precursors to the Medal of Honor. Today's modern, if you will, Medal of Honor.

One of them is the Fidelity Medallion, another was a Certificate of Merit that was issued. Talk to us a little bit about those early attempts to recognize valor on the way to developing the concept of the Medal of Honor.

Mears: Well, there were some precursors and the Continental Congress started authorizing what later became Congressional Gold Medals during the Revolution. At that time, it was mostly for general officers to commemorate victories. They went for the Battle of Saratoga or George Washington's defense of something. So, they would commemorate an event and a person. And eventually that grew into broader recognition. Now civilians receive Congressional Gold Medals. But they don't have actual military significance. Those are not, technically speaking, military awards. They're also not worn, so they are not military awards in the modern understanding.

It is important to understand that the United States in its infancy, and even for the first century of our existence, were a bit reluctant to authorize these awards because of the tradition in Europe and overlap in many cases between military awards and aristocracy.

Historically, a lot of militaries were not necessarily, they weren't all volunteer forces. Officer titles were often purchased commissions. There was a lot of overlap between aristocracy and control of the military in a lot of these countries. So, the biggest awards often went to royalty.

And as a consequence, because the United States had made a clean break from that, it was seen as not very egalitarian to copy something that had this tradition of not benefiting the common man in Europe. We ended up copying them later by World War I, predominantly because when we fought alongside them as allies, it was seen as a potential morale killer to be fighting alongside other forces in the trenches doing the exact same thing, sometimes even under their command, potentially, like US forces fighting under French control in World War I, but not necessarily eligible for military decorations. Even all the way up until the 20th century, it required a waiver by Congress to even accept a foreign military award because of the potential to violate the Constitution.

There's actually an explicit prohibition for titles of nobility. And that was, until more modern times, interpreted to include military awards by foreign governments because of the potential for Great Britain to grant a knighthood or something like that. The Constitution was actually seen as prohibiting military awards, at least from other countries.

And so that very much delayed our own tradition right from the get-go.

Fausone: In very broad strokes, George Washington at the founding of the country wasn't a fan of these kinds of awards. And we go 100 years, and we get to the start of the Civil War. And in

fact, I guess, Abraham Lincoln signed into law a bill that restricted a certain number of Medals of Honor.

Can you talk about what happened at the time of the Civil War?

Mears: There were a couple of medals that preceded the Civil War. And actually, Washington initiated one unilaterally during the Revolution. That was the Badge of Military Merit, what is claimed to be the Purple Heart today, although it really isn't.

Because the Constitution didn't yet exist, there was no prohibition at that time to establishing a military award. And so, Washington did it on his own authority. And when they were looking to expand the military decoration system in the 1930s, Douglas MacArthur, who was the Army Chief of Staff, saw that earlier medal that had fallen quickly into disuse as a way of circumventing congressional authorization.

He claimed that he was resurrecting it as a way of not having to seek congressional authorization. And so that's why we call the Purple Heart the predecessor of the Badge of Military Merit. In reality, it has very little to do with it.

There was a short-lived decoration that was only awarded to, as far as we have any records, just a handful of soldiers near the end of the Revolution. And then we didn't really have any military decorations until the Civil War, as you pointed out. They did authorize a Certificate of Merit during the war with Mexico a few years prior to the Civil War, but that was just a piece of paper.

And so that wasn't a medal that was worn either. They did convert it into a medal later, but that wasn't until the turn of the century that that happened.

And in fact, the Certificate of Merit had lapsed by that time, so they couldn't even award that during the Civil War because it was only authorized during the Mexican War and it was resurrected later. But during the Civil War, until 1861, when they authorized the first statute for the Navy and 1862 for the Army, that was the very beginning. And even then, it was delayed by reluctance on the part of the U.S. leadership to authorize these medals because of the aristocratic underpinnings. The commanding general of the Army actually had previously been asked about awarding medals, and Winfield Scott did not want to authorize a medal until he stepped down. The medal was effectively blocked by the War Department, and then it was authorized once Scott retired after the outbreak of war.

Fausone: And does the modern Medal of Honor criteria trace its roots back to the time of the Civil War or the World Wars?

Mears: Well, I would say that the modern Medal of Honor was born from the Army in World War I. Now, they did obviously tack on the lineage earlier to these 1861 and 1862 authorizations. Anyone that earned it in that earlier period obviously could still wear it, unless it was revoked, which nearly 1,000 were in 1917.

So, they did recognize the earlier medals as equivalent to the modern medal. But from a legal standpoint, it was not, primarily because there were no other medals. If you consider that we have

any manner of service medals and valor medals and achievement medals today, the earliest medals of honor encompassed all of those awards.

And there really were not any regulations that prohibited it from not being awarded for any of those reasons that you might get a very minor medal today for service, gallantry, or otherwise. In fact, combat was not even a prerequisite for the medal earlier on, even though it was authorized very specifically for the War of the Rebellion. It didn't necessarily get awarded only for that. And there were many cases where people were not actually in combat and received a perfectly valid medal.

Fausone: You mentioned that they actually removed about 1,000 recipients from the Army's Medal of Honor list. Those awarded somewhere probably between 1860 and 1917 in that period, they were just given out for a lot of reasons that maybe didn't measure up. Can you tell us why so many medal recipients were removed from the list?

Mears: This review was only for the Army, because it was requested by the War Department and to a lesser extent by the earlier precursor to what today is the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. At that time, it was the Medal of Honor Legion, and these Medal of Honor recipients were not particularly happy with the fact that all these so-called undeserving recipients were adulterating the perception of their awards.

For example, there was an entire infantry regiment from Maine, 864 people that received the medal as an enlistment extension. They agreed to extend their enlistment to guard the Capitol, and most of them didn't actually remain to guard it, but the War Department sent them an entire trunk of 864 medals. And about two-thirds of them didn't actually complete the action that the citation claimed. For so-called bona fide Medal of Honor recipients, that was an egregious situation. Even though the medal, the modern language, the gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty at risk of life with two eyewitnesses in no way existed at that time.

Combat was not a requirement. Gallantry and intrepidity were not necessarily a requirement. And the "above and beyond the call of duty" language didn't even enter into regulations until after the turn of the century.

And that later precluded awards for leadership that would today be recognized by a service medal. Because if the War Department eventually rationalized that if it was your duty to do something, if you were supposed to do it because that was your job, or you were ordered to do it, which made it obligatory, then they ought not to be giving out their highest medal for it because failure to do it would actually open you to censor. If we're going to court martial or punish you for failure to do something, then why are we giving you our highest medal for doing exactly what we're supposed to?

After all, that's just your job.

Fausone: And I think everybody, a lot of people would agree with that. But it's sort of interesting when you delve into this history, the degree of controversy on what should and shouldn't be in trying to receive this award. I understand that after World War I, the Navy tried to break the Medal of Honor into sort of two versions, one combat, one non-combat.

What was the thinking behind that and the outcome or ramifications of doing that?

Mears: Well, it's complicated, and I'll try to give you a very brief synopsis. But because there were different statutes for the Navy and the Army at that time, the services developed different award criteria, because early on, they didn't have much in the way of regulation. The Navy did publish regulations but did not really alter the material criteria in the statute, which were very broad.

The Navy authorized the award for just about anything, and so did the Army. Now, the Army was distinct, though, because the Army published no regulations on the medal until the 1890s, and they only did so because it became a crisis for them.

Once the award became popular, particularly in veteran circles, Union soldiers started requesting the award 30-35 years later in the hundreds every year. Starting largely in the 1890s, these requests were because men started to commemorate the Grand Army of the Republic in reunion kind of get-togethers. And they saw people with the comrades, and in some cases, performed actions that were no more meritorious than their own. They just simply had not been recommended for some reason, and so they started asking for it. And at that time, there was no statute of limitations.

You didn't have to award within a certain number of years. And there wasn't even an eyewitness requirement. Some people just wrote into the War Department asking for the medal on their own affidavit, and many of those likely were fraudulent. It caused the War Department to go into crisis mode because they didn't know how to deal with it. Eventually, they wrote their first regulations in the 1890s, and by the turn of the century, had very strict criteria that were substantially modern.

Then they asked Congress by World War I to codify what was in the regulations, and then that ended up in the statute. But the Navy had developed an entirely different tradition. While the Army's tradition was largely in reaction to this policy vacuum and ironically is exactly what produced the strict criteria today, the Navy didn't have that.

The Navy had regulations that were decentralized, but it still required the Navy Department to sign off on the award. The Navy was more interested in recognizing altruistic actions that saved ships, and they weren't necessarily focused on rewarding combat gallantry like the Army eventually gravitated to.

The Navy, especially after ships started sinking because of boilers exploding and magazines lighting on fire, if sailors went in and sacrificed themselves to save the ship, it didn't matter too much to the Navy that that might not have been incident to a combat situation. They wanted to preserve this ability to award the medal for any action that was altruistic enough that furthered the, you know, put the interest of the crew over the interest of the individual. And the Army's version of the medal eventually focused more on individual combat with the agency that an individual soldier might have in the trenches or on the battlefield.

Fausone: We should really look at the World War period, Korea and Vietnam medals a little bit differently than the earlier medals that were given out by the services under various regulations. Would that be a fair statement?

Mears: Correct. In fact, the Navy's Medal of Honor could be awarded lawfully for non-combat actions until 1963, even though they had ceased doing that. They had attempted to award one as late as the Korean conflict and had been overruled by the Secretary of Defense. But the statutory authorization remained. Until 1963, they had a very different medal. Arguably, it wasn't necessarily equivalent to the Medal of Honor.

And that's not meant to impugn any of the legitimate recipients, of course. But as a matter of fact, it simply was not the Medal of Honor. And the Army's Medal of Honor was not the Medal of Honor until 1918.

And that's just a legal judgment.

Fausone: We're talking to Dwight Mears, PhD, retired army major, deep into these legal issues on medals. And he wrote the book "The Medal of Honor: The Evolution of America's Highest Military Decoration." And it is available on Amazon.

As you've studied this, Dwight, talk to us a little bit about the perceived or inherent biases that the Medal of Honor has or hasn't been awarded to minority soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. And in the work that the Department of Defense has done in trying to justify or rectify, I should say, some of those actions.

Mears: Sure. Well, there's been a number of reviews, starting in the 1990s, to retroactively look at whether or not discrimination had tainted awards, denied awards to deserving recipients. And the first review took place in the early 90s. The Secretary of the Army actually requested it.

There was a team of historians that reviewed African Americans that had served in World War II. And the conclusion of that review produced a number of recommendations for upgrade based on lower awards that had not actually percolated up to become Medals of Honor for whatever reason.

And then Congress passed a waiver of the statute of limitations that normally would have prevented those awards from being authorized because you have to award them, both recommend and award within a discrete period that's specified in the statute. And so that was the beginning of these retroactive reviews. And then in the late 1990s, constituents agitated for the same thing for Asian-American and Pacific Islanders who had served in predominantly in the Army.

And so that a similar review was performed for World War II veterans and an even greater number of Medals of Honor were retroactively authorized from that review under President Clinton. And then starting in, I think it was 2001, they kicked off a review that was originally intended for Jewish-Americans and then it expanded to Hispanic-Americans and even included some African-Americans by the end. And that one did not have as much success.

It took until 2014 for that one to culminate largely because it had to be performed a couple of times before there was agreement on who would be upgraded. But there's not a lot of information on that one. And interestingly, no review of that type has been performed back to World War I for all ethnicities.

I'm working with a group that is looking to authorize a retroactive review of that type for various ethnicities, but particularly African-Americans who are seen as deserving. There have been a

couple that have been upgraded that were never recommended initially at that time. Currently, I think there's only two and they were basically lobbied as individual recipients. They received a waiver of the statute of limitations as a by name bill passed for Congress, but they didn't actually review all the soldiers that served. That's what this task force that I'm working with is attempting to do.

Fausone: Well, let me ask a final question here. And we're talking to Dwight Mears, who's a historian, author, deep thinker on metals. Dwight, tell our Veterans Radio listeners why you think the issuance of the Medal of Honor is still a relevant medal today.

Mears: Well, as long as we have a military that's fighting here overseas, it's relevant because of its intense symbolism. The original reasons that the military authorized this medal were largely for morale. And I don't think many people aspire to earn the Medal of Honor these days.

Certainly, many of the recipients I've heard wish that they had not earned it because it usually means they went through a terrible experience and had a lot of their friends die. And in some cases, they died. And that's not really something that most people aspire to.

But it's relevant nonetheless because the recipients become emblematic of this sense of courage and self-sacrifice that the medal eventually became associated with after we created these other value medals (Silver Star, Bronze Star, etc.) largely after World War I. Because we created these lower medals, it pushed the Medal of Honor very much up and out of reach from the regular soldier. And it becomes a rarity to be awarded it for better or for worse, especially in the conflicts we have today, which are not traditional battlefields, which make the opportunities to receive the medal even less.

It is important because these people are inspiring, because you're not necessarily trying to emulate the Medal of Honor recipients in a literal sense. I think for me, it evokes a sense of putting other soldiers on your left and right, or sailors or marines, first.

They're more valuable than your own life. If you really buy into the ethos of the service, then the medal usually represents sacrificing yourself for your fellow man. And there is no higher sacrifice than that.

Fausone: Well, I think that's an excellent place to bring this to conclusion. We want to thank you, Dwight Mears, for spending some time again with Veterans Radio to talk about the evolution of the Medal of Honor and its place still today in American society.

Mears: Thanks so much for having me.

Medal Of Honor Recipient Colonel Paris Davis

Neal Thorne And Jim Moriarty Discuss The Process

(May 16, 2023)

Fausone: We want to welcome to Veterans Radio today two special guests to talk about Medal of Honor recipient, Colonel Paris Davis. I refer to them as Sherpas - they carried the heavy load up the hill to get this accomplished. We have Neil Thorne, an Army veteran and researcher extraordinaire. Neil, welcome to Veterans Radio.

Thorne: Thanks, Jim.

Fausone: And we also have with Jim Moriarty, a Marine veteran who did three tours in Vietnam. He's an attorney working in the mass torts area, a lot of work with veterans and military related causes. He did a dozen years or so with the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation and finds himself helping out where he can. Jim, welcome to Veterans Radio.

Moriarty: Thank you, Jim, it's good to be with you.

Fausone: You guys got connected on this project for Colonel Paris Davis for action back in Vietnam 58 years ago. He was a Captain involved with the Green Berets and Special Forces. His heroics at the Battle of Bong Son really is what launched this effort to have him recognized and receive the Medal of Honor. Neil, why don't you give a brief description of Colonel Davis's exploits that I think was a 19-hour battle.

Thorne: Colonel Davis was on his second tour in Vietnam in 1965. He volunteered to go into Bong Son which, to that point, had been under enemy control and we had not been able to get a stronghold there. He moved into that area, created a civil irregular defense group (CIDG Group) of what they call Ruff-Puffs. They were local inhabitants that were recruited into a small army, so he built an army there, along with his fellow Green Berets. The locals were eighteen, and this was their first action at the battle of Bong Son.

Captain Davis led that action, engaged and devastated the enemy, and also saved his troops. He was ordered to leave his wounded at one point and he refused to do so. It was a Colonel who had ordered him to leave and, at that time, he was a Captain so he refused to leave his troops. He went out and personally rescued three of them while engaging the enemy, while also coordinating air assets, MEDEVACs and artillery on the site. If you read the accounts of the battle, it is just one of the most heroic actions I've seen.

Fausone: Jim Moriarty, Davis was also injured during this battle. So he's not only recovering guys, while he's being shot and injured, but he won't leave the battlefield even though told to. Do I have that right?

Moriarty: Yeah, he was injured several times. He was hit with grenade fragments and lost the ability to use his trigger finger, so he was forced to shoot his rifle with his pinky. He was shot in the leg, and he still stayed in the fight.

Fausone: The accounts of that battle right at that time noted the heroics here. I should mention that then Captain Paris Davis was one of the first Black Special Forces officers serving in Vietnam in about 1965. So, the country was still dealing with a lot of racial issues.

Neil, why don't you talk a little bit about what happened in that 1965 period about write-ups and why it's 58 years later and we're only now talking about him being awarded the Medal of Honor.

Thorne: The first thing you do when trying to recover or look at any of these medals and awards is FOIA all of the surrounding information. The National Archives had what they called, "The Paris Medal of Honor packet." We FOIA'd that and got it back, and it was not a 1965 Medal of Honor packet at all - it was a 1969 hearing into his medals and awards and the Medal of Honor. In those documents, we also found official testimony given to this Army hearing by his Commander Billy Cole that he had indeed written him up for the Medal of Honor and had taken to it Nha Trang which was 5th Group headquarters at that time.

Also, we found supporting evidence that this was written up by his Commander in 1965 interviews with the reporter, Charlie Black. There are two instances of him mentioning that he had written up Colonel Davis, so that's what led to us discovering that this was truly a lost award. It had been created. The packet and paperwork had been assembled, it was put in at Nha Trang and at that point it should have generated a first review and multiple copies would have gone out. They would have gone to Saigon; they would have gone to Cinc Pac and ultimately the Pentagon. No copies were ever found. So that choke point at group headquarters Nha Trang was where we determined that it had been most likely trashed, because you just don't misplace something like that.

Fausone: Right, this is about the most important thing that's going up the chain at this point. As an experienced researcher something doesn't smell right, does it?

Thorne: No, it doesn't. And it's not even a small packet at that; it would probably have been at least 40 pages. Even our recreated Medal of Honor packet was around 90 pages.

Fausone: This gets "lost" in the 1960s and then just sort of goes away. Nobody talks about it. Jim Moriarty, why don't you jump in here? How do you keep this issue alive for so long? I know you got involved about eight years ago, but you'd worked on some of these other things and when Neil called you up and said, "hey you want to put your talents to work here?" You said, "yes," but it had been cold for decades.

Moriarty: That's only partially true. In 1969, Billy Cole, who is the Battalion Commander, was still alive at that time. He was pushing this from the get-go. We found orders that they had been ordered to recreate the award package, but nobody ever saw that award package again. In 1981, Billy Waugh, who is probably the most famous or the most notorious -- depending on how you look at it -- Special Forces CIA guy. He was one of the people who Paris saved. Billy Waugh submitted a letter, not sworn to, that talked about Paris's heroics and character. He tried to keep it alive.

There was a whole platoon of sherpas -- as you describe them -- trying to keep this deal alive, but nobody really knew where the friction points were, where the obstacles were, until Neil got involved in about 2014. Neil had been working on the Barry Michael Rose Medal of Honor package rising out of Operation Tailwind.

Neil got involved in that with the team of half a dozen, mostly former Army guys that were trying to push this thing forward. Neil turned out to be the most knowledgeable, experienced, aware of the regulations and the problem-solving guy. He jumped in with both feet and ended up really taking the program over because of his vast knowledge. That's when he shows up like a kitten on my doorstep saying, "Well I got this little problem, Neil."

Fausone: Sweet-talked him right into it, didn't you Neil?

Moriarty: Like a complete dumbass. I had completely forgotten about the, "don't volunteer for nothing."

Fausone: He was Arrny, you were a Marine. You walked right into it.

Thorne: I knew it was time to call in the Marines.

Fausone: Neil, this is one of those things that doesn't smell right, it doesn't feel right. What happened? How do you lose two packages of this size? Knowing the regulations as you do, time is your enemy on these, because you're losing witnesses, you're losing certifications. Tell us about some of those hurdles.

Thorne: Sergeant Morgan was one of the men that was on it. He was killed three months after the action. He was most likely one of the first eyewitnesses. We had Billy Waugh, who was still surviving and we also had the testimony of his Commander, Billy Cole, who had the foresight to have his daughter write it down and notarize it for him. We had all kinds of surrounding, supporting evidence, including those 1969 documents the National Archives were holding.

Fausone: Essentially recreated a package -- it's not the original, it's not the second go round -- it's a third package, if you will for the Medal of Honor for Colonel Paris Davis. You have a bunch of documents, but how did you push that forward? Is this where the connections help?

Thorne: Some. Generally, there is everything that's required in a packet. There is an Army Form 638 Nomination for Award and it's got to be filled out perfectly. You have to have signatures of anybody in the chain of command or note if they are deceased or when they died. You also have to have a proposed narrative, a proposed citation, eyewitness statement, supporting evidence -- there's a whole checklist of parts that go into any medal and award packet. Also, the description of the action, the After Action reviews, stuff like that. That's pretty general for any valor medal or award.

Once you get all that put together in a general order, along with a summary, that's when you need to find a member of Congress who is a passthrough. This falls under the US Code Title 10 Section 1130, which is a process for lost, missing or downgraded medals and awards. We then went up to Capitol Hill to find someone who would not only pass it through, but we were also looking for somebody who would be a champion of it as well. It's no problem finding somebody to pass it

through. We had Senators Kaine's and Warner's offices to do that for us. Then it's a matter of following up with Fort Knox, which is the Awards and Decorations Branch -- the first gatekeeper. Making sure they got it, making sure they understand it, making sure that everything is complete.

A first kickback is almost guaranteed with anything because that's kind of them doing their due diligence. Then you address that. It's constantly putting together the packet, getting the packet submitted, making sure it's in the channel and then babysitting it.

Fausone: This is really a labor of love for the team that's doing this. You were involved in it for nine years and other people had been in maybe longer, but really the work is over eight or nine years. Is there a point at which you say this is this is going nowhere or do you just have to stay on it and believe that in the end you'll be successful?

Thorne: We knew we were in the right from the beginning. We knew that an injustice had been done and was still existing. The thought of giving up didn't occur to us.

Fausone: Let me put this to Jim Moriarty, who probably has to dance a little less than Neil does on sensitive issues because Neil is, as they say, this nationally renowned researcher. Jim's a lawyer and a Marine.

You know you were in the right on this because there were clearly some biases going on back in the 60s, back in the *80s,* even here in the 2020s. Do you confront those directly? I know as a mass tort trial lawyer, you like to confront things directly. How do you navigate this to advance it, but confront the biases?

Moriarty: Jim, you're asking a pretty sophisticated question.

Fausone: Well, I'm going to a sophisticated guy who grew up in Texas. You can deal with this. I know you can.

Moriarty: I lived during the 6os. I spent two and a half years in Vietnam. I know what the military was like and I know what the United States was like in terms of the prevalence of racism in the 60s, 70s, *80s,* and indeed today. The fact that the first package disappeared could have been an accident. The fact that the second package disappeared, now it's no longer an accident.

Neil and I gnashed our teeth about this because I didn't want to make this case about racism. I also wasn't going to take "no" for an answer. We pussyfooted around the issue when we re-did the package in 2015 and 2016, where we didn't hang our hats on the racism issue, but we tried to let the reader figure out for themselves what had happened.

Fausone: Certainly.

Moriarty: In 2016, it was an unrelenting battle. I was serving on the board of directors of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. Richard Spencer was Secretary of the Navy, Jim Mattis was Secretary of Defense, John Kelly who I worked for was initially Homeland Security and then he goes over to Chief of Staff at the White House. I had the best connections in the administration that I could possibly have, and I was hitting every single one of them. The idea that this man was not going to be awarded the Medal of Honor for what he did was simply not in my vocabulary.

I went up to Mattis at the awards dinner, and I had these two chapters from Billy Cole's Memoirs that really tell the history of the Vietnam War. Schwarzkopf is in there, Peter Arnett's in there, John Wayne's in there, Barry Sadler the legendary Green Beret. I mean these two chapters, which only cover a small part of the War, really were the core history of the war. Billy Cole tells this wonderful story about how extraordinary Paris's courage was. My attitude was that anybody that's got an IQ over 75 that reads this is going to realize this guy definitely needs to get the Medal of Honor.

Well, Neil successfully pushed the award out of Fort Knox. The initial naysayer was Fort Knox. We got it out of there. In fact, we later learned that Ray Eps, who I believe was the acting Secretary of the Army in 2017 or 2018, sent it out of the Army to the Secretary of Defense's office.

That turned out to be where the real hurdle was. There were two confounding facts: Confounding fact #1 is Billy Waugh has spent way too many years with the CIA and sometimes his stories don't match. Billy's 1981 letter was turned into an affidavit in the early teens and Billy swears that Paris saved his life as he did. Billy then comes out with a couple of so-called books, one of them was Hunting the Jackal. In these, he tells of the Battle of Bong Son where he sort of set out to be the controlling hero and he claims some guy named John Reinberg saved his life. That was confounding fact #1.

Confounding fact #2 is that in 1969, four years after the battle, Reinberg is awarded the DSC and in his DSC citation it says that he saved the life of a soldier. The interim Silver Star citation that was issued in 1965 for Paris, specifically credits him for saving the life of his team Sergeant and Billy Waugh. So, in my view, there was no confounding evidence except that Billy Waugh was having a hard time keeping his stories straight.

There was so much supporting evidence -- Billy Cole's Memoirs, other witnesses' statements, Billy Waugh's earlier sworn affidavit--that I thought this this Reinberg business was just all bullshit. I thought nobody in their right mind would think that there's conflict with who Paris saved because his very Silver Star citation says it was his team sergeant. There was only one team sergeant on the mission.

What really proved to be interesting throughout this eight-year battle is I focused on finding the crew chiefs from the helicopters, finding the pilots from the helicopters, and finding the remaining living witnesses from the battle. I believe there was a New York Times story where there was a fact pilot who was describing his part in the mission and the guy's name was Speedy Gonzalez. Here's all the facts I know about Speedy Gonzalez. He's in the Air Force, he flies a forward air controller aircraft, and his name is Speedy Gonzalez. Like I'm supposed to do something with that? I was talking to a computer researcher about not having the slightest clue where I'm going to find this guy and all I was doing was just bitching, I wasn't making a request.

I go to bed and I wake up the next morning and I've got Speedy Gonzalez's name, address and phone number on my email. It turns out he's a retired Air Force pilot who lives over in San Antonio, and I jump in the car and drive over to interview him.

Fausone: Oh, my goodness.

Moriarty: I tracked down some of the Huey pilots. Part of the pushback was that they needed more living eyewitnesses. I'm sitting there going, you son of a bitches have waited 50 years, until almost everybody's dead and now you want more living eyewitnesses. As it turned out, the Reinberg problem was the core problem because there was in my view a single individual in the Department of Defense's office who took the position that Reinberg's DSC trumped everything.

Now keep in mind, Neil and I have talked to more living witnesses, and now deceased witnesses, who knew more about that mission and any other two people on the planet and nobody has ever said anything about Reinberg ever saving anybody -- not Colonel Cole, not anybody else on the mission. Not Paris Davis.

We actually tracked down the hourlong Phil Donahue interview with Ron Dice and Paris where Paris tells the whole story about how this deal went down. You can't watch that without concluding there's a guy who was there, who knows what happened and who is describing what happened. Now, of course, you can't be awarded a Medal of Honor based on your own testimony, you have to be awarded a Medal of Honor based on other people's testimony. It was certainly corroborative evidence. Ron Dice was a direct eyewitness to important facts.

Fausone: I want to come back to this how you break this loose, because this thing got lost a couple of times, then it got hung up at Fort Knox for a period of years, then it got hung up in the Secretary of Defense's office of Manpower and Reserve Affairs apparently for three years, then it got hung up in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Every time it gets hung up, how do you bust it loose?

Moriarty: Well, I want to answer that question because I was there when the page was blank. We were stopped dead in our tracks in the fall of 2020. We had done everything we knew, we had gone to everybody that had any pull, we had found more witnesses, we found more facts and we were up against the wall. Now we weren't quitting, but we also weren't succeeding.

Chris Miller gets appointed acting Secretary of Defense, and I get a call from now Major General Kevin Leahy who says, "Look, Miller's a Pittsburgh guy, he's a good guy." So, Leahy calls me back the next day and says I've talked to Miller, Miller's a good guy, he's on it like stink on you know what. He's going to appoint one of his key aides to work with you on the Congressional Medal of Honor for Paris Davis.

He assigned this former JAG officer to work with me; we jumped back in it with both feet and this time we confronted the racial issue head on. I had had enough. I just don't want to hear we lost the package twice, but we have no idea what that relates to. That's just nonsense. That is so incredible. So, we jumped in, and we did a multimedia presentation. By this time, there was a team of thousands on the "sherpa" team.

I got a call from one of my buddies in Houston who's a former Fifth Group guy and he's talked a game company executive in Great Britain into doing graphics for us. We tracked down photographs from Ron Dice and other people so we can recreate the mission. What we also did was an overlay of what was going on in the United States at exactly the same time that Paris Davis was so heroically serving our country. The riots in Selma, that famous bridge that they just had the 58th anniversary of -- so we confronted it head on and we did this this multimedia presentation. If

you haven't seen it, I would certainly encourage you to see it. We put this whole package together in about six weeks.

Chris Miller, before Trump went out of office, issued an order that the Department of Defense was to do a review of this whole process, basically to answer the question, "Why hadn't this been done a long time ago?" That's what busted it loose and then the really weird deal is that after Trump left office and after the Biden Administration came in, then we continued to get a year and a half of push back. If it weren't for people like Ellen Cousins or Aaron Powers or Tommy Shook or Neil Thorne or me or another dozen people, including the media, including General Leahy, including General Colonel Chris Miller, including Al Broadband and absolutely including the media. We had - I forget who it was New York Times or The Washington Post -- but we had them do a story and CBS found out about the deal and CBS did a story. I mean by this time it's a team of thousands, but we would have never gotten it done without all these sherpas.

Fausone: That's exactly right. I think it again, the general public just sees the award ceremony and says there's a nice old guy who got it, must have done something right. But there's so much more to the story and it interweaves with what's going on in the country. And some of it's just fortuitous.

Moriarty: Paris Davis is just one of the nicest people you could ever see in your whole life. You could sit in the bar and drink with him for days and never have a hint that he is self-effacing and down to earth and warm and loving and caring. Paris was so supportive when I lost my son. Here's a guy who's got every right to be very pissed off in our country for how he was treated and all he could do was to show support for me and my family, and the loss of my son. The fact that my son was indirectly involved with getting Paris awarded the Medal of Honor would have meant a tremendous amount to my son.

Fausone: And you've really described what many Medal of Honor recipients are, humble men who have done extraordinary things. But they served, they knew what their duty was and they went way beyond it. Getting the award is not necessarily about their individual recognition or rewards, it's really for the community.

We were talking about this earlier, Jim Moriarty, on getting Purple Hearts for guys It's really about what this will mean to Paris Davis's family, the African-American Community, the Special Forces community, that much larger recognition that the Medal of Honor provides to folks. I suspect both of you gentlemen have seen that played out with other recipients of the Medal and are seeing it played out with this particular award to Colonel Davis.

Moriarty: Well, I would go a little bit beyond that. Every little kid in this country, male or female, uncertain about their sex, Black or White, liberal or conservative, deserves to see someone who looks like them recognized for extraordinary service and courage above and beyond the call of duty. We owe every single one of these people who do that, and we owe the children of our country the opportunity to see what a real hero looks like. They are not all White, they're not all male, they're not all young, they could be old, they can serve in unusual capacities.

The children of our country deserve to see everybody who serves and aspires to that level of courage, and that's part of what is so satisfying here. In my mind, Paris Davis is the perfect recipient because he is such an extraordinarily decent human being who was faced with the loss of his career.

He was faced with the Hobson's choice: Do I abandon my men on the battlefield and obey this order? Or do I say, "Nope. I am not leaving until all of my men leave with me?" And that willingness to sacrifice his life and his career to protect others is, in my view, what this country is all about.

Fausone: These men are getting the story out to our youth. That's certainly what we're trying to do here on Veterans Radio. Neil Thorne, we really appreciate the work that you do as a researcher.

Thorne: Thank you, Jim. It's an honor.

Thorne: Thank you for what you're doing, Jim.

Fausone: And again, thanks for all your time today here on Veterans Radio.

Medal Of Honor Recipient Ken David's MOH Sherpa Herm Breuer

(September 14, 2025)

Fausone: We want to welcome to Veterans Radio today, Herm Brewer. Herm is an Army veteran. He's going to tell us a fascinating story about his involvement in getting the Medal of Honor awarded. It was really an upgrade of an award for Ken David, who he met in Trumbull County, Ohio. Herm, welcome to Veterans Radio.

Breuer: Thanks for having me, Jim.

Fausone: This is a great opportunity to peel the curtain back a little bit and find out what really goes on to get somebody awarded the Medal of Honor. And then, interestingly, what's it like at the White House? But let's start here. Tell us a little bit about your service.

Breuer: I'm an Army veteran. I was actually born during Vietnam, born July 28, 1968. Ironically, the same day, one of my father's second cousins was killed in Vietnam. I always had kind of this strange fascination with the war in Vietnam growing up. Fast forward school -- I was going to join the Army, decided at the last minute to go to college instead.

While I was in college, I enlisted in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. And while I was at boot camp, something happened called Operation Desert Shield. The unit that I was with at Fort Sill was headed straight to the desert basically from boot camp and jump school. I volunteered in that first round.

I got out of the Guard in 1996, reenlisted in the Guard after September 11th, in the same field artillery unit. I got called up to become military police in Iraq. While I was in Iraq, I was tasked to be personal security for Commanding General Ham and his staff in Mosul, Iraq.

I was wounded by a roadside bomb on March 24, 2004, and came home from the deployment in 2005. When I returned to the workforce and went to apply to the VA for benefits, I was sent to the county veteran office.

And lo and behold, the county veteran service officer there at the time was wounded in Vietnam. And he and I developed a friendship and asked me to come and work in the office. And I did that and I never looked back. So that started my life as a veteran advocate.

Fausone: And you spent 19 years as a veteran service officer for Trumbull County.

Breuer: That's right. Yep. And what an opportunity that is. You meet people with all types of service, from retired with 30 years of service, all the way down to the ones who didn't quite fit the bill. I was able to hear in my early years of being a county veteran service officer -- some fantastic World War II stories from every type of service -- some just great stories over the years.

Fausone: You found yourself able to help people with their medals and whatnot. And veteran service officers do that on an occasional basis. But it's that experience and your involvement with

the local Disabled American Veterans Post that sort of brought somebody to you who said, you know, you got to listen to this Ken David guy's story. Tell us how that happened.

Breuer: I was familiar with Ken before they brought the case into my office. He actually was working with my predecessor and was still there at the time.

Nobody had a lot of background in real roll up your sleeves, medals, upgrades and things of that nature. Because the nature of the county veteran service officer businesses is focused, hyper-focused on VA disability.

We can dabble in some of those things. I can send off a request for records. I can do this and I can do that. But as far as actually a real responsibility, the county veteran service officer, technically, that's it's in their wheelhouse, but it's not in their wheelhouse.

It's one of the things we're trying to work to change. That was what precipitated someone to refer him to me was that bronze star medal, because somebody saw that I went and did a little bit more than just the average person by making some contacts of people that I was networked with just to see what was possible.

I knew that there were previous attempts and I had heard he got the Distinguished Service Cross, second highest in recognition. Ken and another one of his compadres came in and they kind of told me their story of, hey, we think it's not right that Ken didn't get the Medal of Honor, so on and so forth. And being in that veteran advocate role, you know, there were plenty of people that would come to me with their stories about why they deserved more than what they got.

As an advocate, you've got to have a degree of skepticism, but then also you've got to keep your ears open for the story. And so that's what I did. And I listened to the story and listened to the questions that they had had, you know, because I think Ken may have alluded to it, but the medic who was on the scene that day was originally awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

That was kind of what caused Ken and his buddies to have some questions as to how that happened, but Ken didn't. So that was what was brought to me and kind of dumped on my desk. I went back through my original contacts through General Ham.

Fausone: Thanks for picking up the phone. I got another one for you. And it's a lot harder.

Breuer: Right. And that's exactly what they told me. They said they said, you know, whatever the circumstances surrounding the medic's Medal of Honor, you can never do anything that would negatively impact the story of the medic. And I understood that. It’s not that we're going to say, hey, this guy deserved it and that guy didn't. Because at that point, the medic had been deceased for 15 years.

Unfortunately, took his own life, I believe, in 1993. So, I had conversations with them to find out what it would require. The General that I was working with was Larry Gutardi.

Larry actually forwarded Ken's information through me to the Adjutant General of the army at that time, which was General Pete Mustian. So, I went through General Mustian's office. They said, yeah, it sounds like there may be something here and here is what you'll need.

That was about a two-and-a-half-page list of documented evidence statements and so forth. I can tell you what Ken had as far as evidence at that time. Ken had the daily staff journals, which were extremely helpful. It included the medevac reports showing who was on which bird. He had the unit manning roster that showed everybody's unit line number. He had a lot of specific information about who, what, when and where didn't have a lot that was going to fill in the blanks. There were a ton of letters from people from the community and legislators about Ken's a nice guy and we think he needs the Medal of Honor.

Fausone: It just doesn't cut it. People feel good doing that, but there is a very rigorous process here with specific evidence that's needed. And let's remember, this is activity that occurred in May of 1970 in Vietnam. And what year is it now that you've picked this up and said, OK, let me see if I can help?

Breuer: At this point, as I'm starting to get into it and peel the onion back, it's 2010 -- 2009 was like the first like email off to see if this was something I could look into.

Fausone: So, we're 40 years later and you need his commanding officer to sign an affidavit. That two-page list they sent you is very specific about what you need and whether those guys are alive or not 40 years later.

Breuer: And that's the thing that is really interesting. Literally, he had this one of those Rubbermaid containers with all of the letters. And really the thing is that when you talked to anybody that would put one of those letters together or you talk, he deserves this. But who's going to do that? Who's going to do the work that's on that two-page list? Nobody's going to do that work for you.

There is no one in an agency that's required to put that together for you. The only people that were required to do that are your chain of command while you're still in uniform. Right? At this point, we are 40 years down the road.

But just like you're talking about. If we go back through the chain of command, which I did. But if we have to go back through somebody's chain of command, if it's maybe three years after the fact, maybe you might be able to Google some people and so forth.

But we're talking about something that happened in 1970, where the average age of the combat foot soldier we know was 19. The average age of their first line leaders was probably less than 25. Those guys are now obviously going to be closer to 80 years old.

And then when we get into company commanders, battalion commanders, brigade commanders, those individuals at that point are going to be in their 90s and greater than that. The ability to kind of track down a lot of that stuff or to say, who's going to do that? You know, because I do that once a month when I sit in a veterans organization meeting and the guy in the very back row says, “I think we should do this.” And you think, well, that's interesting that you've got that great idea to do that. So, I think you're volunteering to do.

Fausone: Go beyond talk. Let's see action.

Breuer: Exactly. That was the case for Ken. There were plenty of people that said, oh, I'm going to put in a good word for you and I'm going to do this. I jumped in in 2009; there were people that started putting nice letters together in 1998. That big Rubbermaid container that he had had letters from, you know, Governor George Voinovich and Senator Mike DeWine. All of these letters are in there and that's all well and good.

Fausone: Let me again, put some time frame on this. This is 40 years later or more. You're working on it from 2010 on. President Biden gives him the Medal of Honor award in a ceremony in January of 2025. It's 15 more years. How does a guy stay with it, Herm?

Breuer: We started to put together some requests in about 2012. Just gathering evidence, trying to understand the process, looking for any avenue that I can. And what we found was that there was a really important document missing in Ken's file. And that was the original D.A. 638. The D.A. 638 is an Army request for an award. The easiest way to explain this, because ever since this has happened, that Ken did receive the upgrade, I still have people contacting me.

There is no way that anyone can receive an upgraded medal unless you can understand what the circumstances were that got them the award that they got. That's the reason that the D.A. 638 is required in the Medal of Honor upgrade, because there's no way for them to look at the new D.A. 638 versus the old D.A. 638. That was the showstopper for a long time for us.

We went around and around. We tried contacts at the Richard Nixon Library in California. We tried contacts at the 101st Airborne Historian. We thought maybe it was a unit record that maybe we were missing. Keep in mind, you put in a request to an agency like that, you're talking maybe you'll hear back in about eight months.

Fausone: And maybe they lost it. And certainly, personnel has rotated.

Breuer: Oh, yes. And that happened quite often. We did put in some requests before we got the 638. Most of those requests would come back saying, thank you for your interest in seeking the Medal of Honor upgrade. However, you're missing this.

At one point in this process, and I think it's important to note that I've got a regular job, too. In this time period, I'm assisting veterans with a multitude of other things. In 2016, I became an executive board member for this National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, which was now exposing me to more resources.

And through that, I started to travel more and more to Washington, D.C. On one of my travels in early 2017, I went personally to the archives at College Park, Maryland, because this would be where unit records were kept. And this was really the key that opened the door. And I don't know if you've ever taken a trip to the archives at College Park, but it's very interesting.

They only let in so many visitors at a time. You have to have a visitor's pass. Once you have the visitors' pass, they screen you to make sure that you don't have any telephones on you.

You have no pens or anything that can destroy the documents that you're going to look at. And they give you a pencil and a blank index card. And they tell you which floor you might find the files on that you're looking for.

There are some files that are open to the public, much like a library. The majority of the files that are stored at College Park are archived, and you have to have an archivist. You have to tell them what it is -- that's why you have the index card. This is what I'm looking for. They go back into their cubbyhole and see what they can find.

And so that's what I did, knowing that unit records from 101st could have possibly been stored there. And I asked them for all requests for awards from May of 1970 through January of 1971, just in the off chance that it was misfiled or something. You had to tell them specifically what your request is for, and you had to have authorization for that release.

I was looking for Ken David's Distinguished Service Cross DA-638. Unfortunately, they came back and they said they didn't have his original DA-638.

I said, okay. I thought about it for a minute before I told them thank you and turned around and left. And I said, is there a chance that you can tell me if you have the Medal of Honor packet for Kenneth Case?

Fausone: That being the medic on the same day, in the same firefight against about the 300 enemy fighters who had zeroed in on Company D's position, which had 50 or 60 soldiers. And he was a medic for that.

Breuer: They confirmed that they did, but they also confirmed that I didn't have a release for that file of information. I came back home, hat in hand, and contacted our local representative's office. And our local representative at the time was Tim Ryan. He was fortunate enough to have a defense fellow in his office in Washington.

If there's anybody out there that is in legislature, I would encourage you to have a defense fellow in your office in Washington because they speak a different language than other liaisons do. The first defense fellow was a Harvard grad. He was a, I don't know Navy rank, lieutenant commander.

He was able to kind of help me to understand, here's kind of what is being requested from the Army Awards Branch. Let's go through and take a look at your evidence. And unfortunately, those fellows are only assigned to those offices for a period of time.

That individual left and we wound up getting an Army officer, lieutenant colonel, who was really sharp and understood the medal process. I understood the medal process from my time after I was wounded and came home, worked in the first sergeant's office and had a little bit of experience in writing up commendation medals and achievement medals and so forth. I understood that it was a process and you had to follow that process.

My training as a county veteran service officer kind of came into play, because now I was starting to understand dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs. I understand it's a process. There are things they want to see. For all those years of just saying, here's what we have, and sending,

submitting that and getting back those denials, I started to understand more and more that unless I hit every one of those bullets, they're not even going to look at this packet.

Fausone: That's particularly true at Awards and Dec. I mean, they are very particular. I want to back up because without some sort of professional help, this wouldn't have been done. There are requirements about how soon after the action that you can be awarded it through command. So, 40-some years later, you're going to need an act of Congress to open back up the time frame to allow Ken to get the award based on what the Army says and what the president says, correct?

Breuer: Exactly. One of those bullets in there is you have to be able to prove that you are providing something new and material that could not have been known to the chain of command at the time.

So now, and looking at the chain of command, so his platoon leader was killed instantly. His company commander was killed July 20th. So, there were two big parts of his immediate chain of command that would have been aware of his DSC otherwise, but for being killed.

There would be no way that those individuals would know anything that is new because they're deceased. And we were able to kind of prove that. The new defense fellow now was able to get the congressional Medal of Honor packet for Kenneth Case from the archives.

We were able to take that packet then and line it up next to Ken's to determine what we were missing. We were able to determine his entire chain of command based on that packet because it showed every signature from the eyewitnesses on forward.

Fausone: I'm going to speed you up a little bit because otherwise we're going to run out of time here. And again, all this work gets done. The stuff gets pulled together, gets submitted. How long between the submittal and if you will, the phone call? Because what typically happens is the army starts making calls to, in this instance, Ken saying, we want to ask you about this. And at some point, those phone calls change from just informational to something's coming. What are we talking timewise? Because as I said, you worked on this for 15 years.

Breuer: The final completed packet, I want to say it was 2019 that it was submitted. And from the time that the final packet was submitted, I had a Zoom call with the Adjutant General of the Army in 2020 with our congressional representative just to try and determine what the status was. It had been with them for over a year at that point. We were able to lock down that the board, which is comprised of a couple officers at the very front gate, was able to give it a, and I forget their language, but it's something like they didn't say no. They didn't say yes, but they didn't say no.

Fausone: It's a partial win.

Breuer: Which means it moves forward. It moved to the secretary of the army's office sometime around 2021. As it was moving through the secretary of the army's office, I was trying to utilize all contacts that we could to try and figure out what was going on there. We didn't have a lot of communication back from 2021 until Secretary Austin notified. Secretary Austin signed it on August 8, 2023, and that told us then that it was moved to the White House. Once it moved to the White House, I tried to find contacts with it because at that point it's cloaked in complete secrecy. In the Pentagon, I was at least kind of able to track it down.

As it dragged through the halls of the Pentagon and then through the halls of the White House, it was extremely frustrating because you know that Ken's story is a story that's worthy of this upgrade. And you know now that it's being scrutinized by top brass, top administrative officials.

And once it got to the White House and we knew it was at the White House in August of 2023, I believe that Ken received a phone call in the summer of 2024 from army awards branch saying they were tracking this and wanted to ask some questions just as you had alluded to. And then from that point, I believe it was Halloween that Ken got the call from the President that it was coming.

Fausone: I want to tell folks, listen to the interview with Ken David that we did here on Veterans Radio. We're talking to Herm Brewer, who is in my terms, the Medal of Honor Sherpa for Ken David. He put the package with some other folks together, had to carry it up Mount Everest.

These guys are all humble about getting the Medal of Honor. And Ken's a very humble man, worked in HVAC in Trumbull County, retired from there. And this is going to change his life, whether he realizes it in the summer of 2024 or not.

And as I said, in January of 2025, before President Biden leaves office, he has Ken come in and they have the ceremony. It takes a long time, even a long time to get through the White House. But you were in the room.

Tell us a little bit about being at the White House for this Medal of Honor ceremony from 40 years ago for a friend of yours locally there in Trumbull County.

Breuer: It's tough to put into words because, in my eyes, they are treated as royalty and justly so. Keep in mind that Ken's award was with seven or eight posthumous awards that were done at the same time. And all of their families are there, too. The room is packed and you're hearing story after story.

I mean, history that was not being told before is now being told. And it's so humbling to be able to be there and see this, and especially with Ken. When I started trying to help Ken, his parents were still with us.

I think Ken mentioned to you before, Sam Lanza. Sam was kind of a World War II veterans advocate, DAV, Mr. Veterans Service Organization. And Sam was kind of the one that was like, you got to make sure he gets this. He deserves this. I told Sam then we were going to do whatever it took. And, you know, we were fortunate enough to be able to see that all the way through to the end.

The trip to the White House was so humbling to be able to see Ken up there getting the award. It just really kind of melted your heart.

Fausone: Well, and it's a room at that point full of generals and depending on who else is being awarded admirals and more brass than you've ever seen before. The president's there. This is as close as we come to that type of ceremony. The British do it a lot better, but this is what we do.

Give us a reaction of what it was like in the room.

Breuer: You could have literally heard a pin drop, because there are brass everywhere.

And not just the brass that are up front, the generals that are up front. Essentially, the halls are lined with majors and colonels directing you where to go. They really pulled out every stop. The Army band was playing as soon as you walked through the halls of the White House.

After the ceremony was over, we were able to socialize with some of the brass and the other families as well. There was the daughter of a Korean War veteran who was there. Actually, their family was also from Ohio. Unfortunately, he was killed in action. And his service is also just like Ken's, just the story that is being told. You just feel so happy for these families to be able to finally see that their loved one was recognized as well.

Fausone: Maybe that's where we'll try to bring this to a conclusion. Thanks for staying on longer than I asked you to. Talk about why this is important to the larger community. I think that's what maybe people don't recognize. Yeah, this is great for Ken and his family, but there's a larger community aspect to this, isn't there?

Breuer: When I look at the whole thing, just like you're saying that, having served in Iraq. And I know that there were people that I served probably deserved higher recognitions than they received also.

And that there are so many stories like this that will go untold. And that's unfortunate. But for anybody that thinks that so-and-so received this medal and that's an injustice, that the only way for you to right that injustice is by you taking the action to go and make that happen for that individual.

It wasn't that somebody was being derelict in their duty, because that wasn't the case for Ken. What we were able to prove was that out of the chain of command, only one was still alive and he was 97 years old in a nursing home in Texas. And that was General Benjamin Harrison. But, that's the whole thing. There wasn't anybody that was derelict. And there are hundreds of thousands, maybe even more stories like this out there.

If you're going to really be serious about saying so-and-so deserves X, Y, and Z and you feel passionate about it, then you better be prepared for an uphill battle and be prepared to roll up your sleeves because it's going to require some effort. It's not just going to be somebody's going to go, oh, you're right. He deserves that.

That's not how it works at all.

Fausone: In the larger community, this is good for Ken, good for his local DAV which supported him, good for Trumbull County that supported him, all of Ohio for the Midwest. I mean, these awards recognize our neighbors, our friends, people, and tradesmen that we work with, just regular guys who will never talk about their story. But this brings the story to life, doesn't it, Herm?

Breuer: It really does. And I can't emphasize what you just said enough because a lot of times, they'll all say, well, I was just doing my job because that's clearly the way that they see it. But when you're able to kind of see that from like a 10,000-foot view and go, wait a minute, he was on

a part of a larger operation and you can tell that story. Unfortunately, sometimes the Sherpa can probably tell the story better than the recipient can recite the story.

Fausone: Absolutely.

Breuer: Knowing all of the other factors involved that came to put it all together. And that's what's really important. When you see that injustice, be prepared to be able to tell that story and tell it effectively. So that way it can, that injustice can get righted.

Fausone: We certainly appreciate the time, Herm Brewer, that you've spent with us today on Veterans Radio to tell us the story of Ken David's upgrade to the Medal of Honor. Again, these are the sort of stories you don't want to lose. You want them, if you will, digitized on the internet forever.

And we hope in the future people will go listen to Ken's story with the interview we did with him and certainly here with Herm Brewer. And you'll find articles about Ken if you use your basic search engines. Herm, thanks for the time that you gave us today.

Breuer: Absolutely. My pleasure. Thanks for having me.