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Vietnam Veterans of America

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Mokie Porter (301) 996-0901

VVA Applauds the Recognition of Four Vietnam Veterans Awarded the Medal of Honor

(Washington, D.C.) -- “Vietnam Veterans of America commends President Joseph Biden for yesterday’s recognition of the incredible acts of heroism of four U.S. Army Vietnam veterans by upgrading their previous awards to the Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest military medal for valor and bravery,” said VVA National President Jack McManus.

“Of the 66 surviving Medal of Honor recipients today, 48 are Vietnam veterans. Our Vietnam Medal of Honor recipients represent an entire generation of Vietnam servicemembers who waited too long to receive the welcome home and the recognition they deserved,” McManus said. “And while this public acknowledgement of these heroes is long overdue, coming half a century after these soldiers left these fields of battle, it’s also vital to keep remembering all those military servicemembers who put everything on the line to defend our nation and our values.”

“The story of each of these men is truly inspirational,” McManus added. “They embody the men and women who enter our armed forces, prepared to give their lives. This official gesture toward setting the record straight is one way that we can honor them and remember their service.”

Staff Sergeant Edward N. Kaneshiro received his posthumous MOH for actions while serving as an infantry squad leader with Troop C, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, near Phu Huu 2, Kim Son Valley, Republic of Vietnam. On Dec. 1, 1966, while on a search and destroy mission, the squad was attacked. Sgt. Kaneshiro destroyed one enemy group with rifle fire and two others with grenades, enabling the orderly extrication and reorganization of the platoon and ultimately leading to a successful withdrawal from the village.

SP5 Dwight W. Birdwell’s MOH recognizes his actions while serving with Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on January 31, 1968. Tan Son Nhut Airbase was under attack, and the enemy disabled or destroyed many of the unit’s vehicles, including SP5 Birdwell’s tank commander. Under heavy enemy small-arms fire, he first fired the tank’s weapons and then dismounted and continued fighting until receiving enemy fire to his face and torso. SP5 Birdwell remembers, “I stood on top of my tank with my M-16 rifle to fire at the enemy. I didn’t want to die, but I wanted to do my job.” After refusing evacuation to lead a small group of defenders to disrupt the enemy assault, Spec. 5 Birdwell finally boarded a medevac helicopter, only to crawl out the other side to continue aiding in evacuating the wounded until he was ordered to seek attention for his own wounds.

SP5 Dennis M. Fujii received the MOH for his actions while serving as crew chief aboard a helicopter ambulance during rescue operations in Laos and the Republic of Vietnam from February 18-22, 1971. During a mission to evacuate seriously wounded Vietnamese military personnel, SP5 Fujii's medevac helicopter took on enemy fire and was forced to crash land. Although injured, he waved off a rescue from another helicopter and remained behind as the only American on the battlefield. During that night and the next day, although wounded, he administered first aid to allied casualties. On the night of February 19, he called in American helicopter gunships to assist in repelling an enemy attack. For more than 17 hours, he 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 until an American helicopter could attempt to airlift him from the area.

Major John J. Duffy received the MOH for his actions while serving as senior advisor to the 11th Airborne Battalion, 2nd Brigade, Airborne Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam, from April 14-15, 1972. Two days earlier, the commander of the 11th Airborne Battalion had been killed, the battalion command post destroyed, and Major Duffy was twice wounded. The only American left with a squad of South Vietnamese soldiers, he refused an order to evacuate, telling his superiors, "I will be the last man out." For the next 48 hours, despite additional injuries, Major Duffy continued directing operations and fighting. After an enemy ambush, he led evacuees, many wounded, to an evacuation area. Only after ensuring all evacuees were aboard the helicopters he had called in, did he board as well.