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"I knew that I lived in a country in which the aspirations of black people were limited, marked-off. Yet I felt that I had to go somewhere and do something to redeem my being alive."

— *Richard Wright, Black Boy*

Commemorating Forgotten Soldiers The Medal of Honor - 2014

The Medal of Honor is the highest-ranking decoration for heroism in combat authorized in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln. Over the years, the Medal has symbolized the highest measure of individual acts of gallantry in battle in the American military. It is awarded in the name of Congress of the United States and, whenever possible, the President personally makes its presentation. In 1916, Congress created a special board to investigate and report past awards and in 1918, they redefined the criteria saying in legislation that the recipient must "distinguish himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty."




On April 6, 1865, 12 soldiers became the first African Americans to receive the Medal. They were members of the five regiments of the U.S. Colored Troops who fought at New Market Heights, VA. A total of 78 African American soldiers earned the Medal of Honor by the end of World War I.

Interest in black military heroes and the question of adequate recognition of their valor remained high. More than 700,000 black soldiers served in World War II. Of the 294 Medals of Honor awarded, none were bestowed on African Americans. The second highest award - the Distinguished Service Cross - was awarded to only eight soldiers out of the 4,750 Crosses awarded. Following a study conducted by Shaw University and the U.S. Army, eight African American World War II soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton on January 13, 1997.

A 12-year Pentagon review, through the Defense Authorization Act, called for a review of Jewish American and Hispanic American veterans to ensure those deserving the Medal were not denied due to prejudice. Soldiers of Jewish and Hispanic heritage were discovered as well as additional African Americans. Again, several soldiers had previously received the Distinguished Service Cross. Nineteen additional soldiers, who had been overlooked, were included in this review.

On March 18, 2014, President Barack Obama awarded the Medal of Honor to 24 Army veterans for their conspicuous valor during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

The Medal of Honor awarded to members of the Armed Forces who distinguish themselves conspicuously by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while -

-  Engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States
-  Engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force
-  Serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

The Medal of Honor was awarded to the following three soldiers at the White House -

– Sgt. 1st Class **Melvin Morris**, African American, Vietnam War

On Sept. 17, 1969, soldiers from 1st and 3rd Battalions, IV Mobile Strike Force were conducting a search and clear operation near Chi Lang, Vietnam. Morris, commander of 3rd Company, 3rd Battalion, learned that sister companies from his battalion had encountered an extensive enemy mine field and were engaged with the enemy.



Morris immediately reorganized the force into an effective assault posture and moved them forward before he and two other men went to recover the body of a fallen team commander. Enemy fire wounded the two men with Morris, so he helped them back to the main force and then charged alone into the hail of fire. He threw grenades into the nearest enemy bunker. While his men provided suppressive fire, Morris destroyed four more enemy positions to get to his fallen comrade.

Morris was wounded three times but he did not stop until he brought the fallen soldier back to safety. (Morris pictured above - now and then.)

– Master Sgt. **Jose Rodela**, Hispanic American, Vietnam War

On Sept. 1, 1969, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Mobile Strike Force Command in Phuoc Long Province, Vietnam, moved to support a sister battalion that had suffered heavy casualties. On their way there, the soldiers from 3rd Battalion came under heavy mortar, rocket, machine-gun and small arms fire. The attack was so intense the unit suffered 42 casualties almost immediately.

Rodela, a company commander, immediately began to move from man to man in his company, physically pushing them into defensive positions to form a half-moon perimeter. His actions allowed the unit to organize a defensive perimeter. When the firing eased, Rodela jumped up, exposing himself to enemy fire, and began checking for casualties and moving survivors into different positions to try and form a stable defensive line.

– Spc. **Santiago Erevia**, Hispanic American, Vietnam War

On May 21, 1969, Erevia's company was engaged in a search and clear operation near Tam Ky in Vietnam's Quang Tin Province. After a number of light skirmishes, the soldiers, from C Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, arrived at a hillside, where they came under heavy enemy fire and suffered numerous casualties. Erevia, the radio telephone operator, was asked by his platoon leader to give aid to four wounded comrades while the others pushed forward against the enemy.

While caring for the wounded, the men came under intense automatic weapons and small arms fire from four enemy bunkers about 50 meters to their left. With bullets striking all around him, Erevia crawled from one wounded man to another, gathering up weapons and ammunition. Armed with two M-16 rifles and several hand grenades, Erevia moved in on the enemy bunkers.

Erevia pulled the pin on a hand grenade and fired his rifles until he was able to drop the grenade into a bunker, destroying the position and killing the enemy fighter. Erevia continued to move to the other three bunkers and silenced them by throwing a grenade at two positions and firing his M-16 at the last bunker. He then returned to aid in treating and evacuating the dead and wounded from his company.

The remaining 21 soldiers are deceased; family members were present at the ceremony to receive the award.

The following individuals served during the Vietnam War -

Sergeant **Candelario Garcia** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an acting Team Leader for Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Lai Khe, Republic of Vietnam on December 8, 1968.

Specialist Four **Leonard L. Alvarado** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a Rifleman with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) during combat operations against an armed enemy in Phuoc Long Province, Republic of Vietnam on August 12, 1969.

Staff Sergeant **Felix M. Conde-Falcon** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an acting Platoon Leader in Company D, 1st Battalion, 505th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Ap Tan Hoa, Republic of Vietnam on April 4, 1969.

Specialist Four **Ardie R. Copas** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a Machine Gunner in Company C, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy near Ph Romeas Hek, Cambodia on May 12, 1970.

Specialist Four **Jesus S. Duran** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an acting M-60 Machine Gunner in Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) during combat operations against an armed enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on April 10, 1969.

The following individuals served during the Korean War -

Corporal **Joe R. Baldonado** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an acting machine gunner in 3rd Squad, 2nd Platoon, Company B, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kangdong, Korea on November 25, 1950.

Corporal **Victor H. Espinoza** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an Acting Rifleman in Company A, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Chorwon, Korea on August 1, 1952.

Sergeant **Eduardo C. Gomez** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving with Company I, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Tabu-dong, Korea on September 3, 1950.

Private First Class **Leonard M. Kravitz** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an assistant Machine Gunner with Company M, 5th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Yangpyong, Korea on March 6 and 7, 1951.

Master Sergeant **Juan E. Negron** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a member of Company L, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kalma-Eri, Korea on April 28, 1951.

Master Sergeant **Mike C. Pena** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a member of Company F, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Waegwan, Korea, on September 4, 1950.

Private **Demensio Rivera** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an automatic rifleman with 2nd Platoon, Company G, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Changyong-ni, Korea on May 23, 1951.

Private **Miguel A. Vera** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an automatic rifleman with Company F, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division in Chorwon, Korea, on September 21, 1952.

Sergeant **Jack Weinstein** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while leading 1st Platoon, Company G, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division in Kumsong, Korea on October 19, 1951.

The following individuals served during World War II -

Private **Pedro Cano** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving with Company C, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Schevenhutte, Germany on December 3, 1944.

Private **Joe Gandara** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 17th Airborne Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Amfreville, France on June 9, 1944.

Private First Class **Salvador J. Lara** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as the Squad Leader of a rifle squad with 2nd Platoon, Company L, 180th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Aprilia, Italy on May 27 and 28, 1944.

Sergeant **William F. Leonard** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a Squad Leader in Company C, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy near St. Die, France on November 7, 1944.

Staff Sergeant **Manuel V. Mendoza** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a Platoon Sergeant with Company B, 350th Infantry, 88th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy on Mt. Battaglia, Italy on October 4, 1944.

Sergeant **Alfred B. Nietzel** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a section leader for Company H, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Heistern, Germany on November 18, 1944.

First Lieutenant **Donald K. Schwab** received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as the Commander of Company E, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, during combat operations against an armed enemy near Lure, France on September 17, 1944.

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