

**Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Captain Larry L. Taylor**  
*September 5, 2023*

Please be seated. Thank you.

What a distinguished group of Americans. Former Medal of Honor winners, thank you for being here.

Folks, in a few days, young women and men from across the country are going to arrive at Fort Moore, Georgia, to attend Ranger School, one of the toughest military courses in the world. For nearly 20 hours every day, they'll run, march, swim, and climb some of the most challenging obstacles under the most grueling of conditions.

But most importantly, they'll learn how to lead, studying the stories of our greatest nation's warriors. They include the story of a pilot who, 55 years ago, risked his own life to save a group of young soldiers like them. The pilot we honor today: Captain Larry Taylor.

The Medal of Honor is our Nation's oldest and highest recognition of valor. Now, when I called Larry to let him know he finally was receiving this recognition, his response was, "I thought you had to do something to receive the Medal of Honor." [*Laughter*] Let me say that again. He said, "I thought you had to do something to receive the Medal of Honor."

Well, Larry, you sure in hell did something, man. If you ask anyone here, I'm pretty sure they'd say something—you did something extraordinary. That includes our Secretary of the—of the Defense Austin—Secretary Austin, Secretary McDonough, the Army—the Secretary of the Army Wormuth, Chairman Milley, and Senator Black—where is Senator—Senator Blackburn?—and also Senator Hagerty, who all have joined us today.

I also want to thank the previous Medal of Honor recipients who have come to recognize their brother-in-arms: Paris Davis, Walter Marm, and James McCloughan, and Leroy Petey—Petey, excuse me. Gentlemen, you're the very best the Nation has to offer. We owe you.

The same goes for Sergeant David Hill—Vietnam veteran; former firefighter; and as the last surviving member of Larry's mission, the driving force behind his Medal of Honor nomination.

On behalf of our Nation, thank you all for being here.

And finally, Toni. Larry learned many ranks and call signs throughout his military service—he earned them: Captain, Dark Horse, Mustang, and probably a few we can't say out loud. [*Laughter*] Best left out of the Presidential record, I guess. [*Laughter*] But I believe—I believe—that Larry is most proud of being called your husband.

And it's an honor—it's an honor—to have you both here as we give this heroism its full recognition that it deserves.

Born in the Volunteer State, raised by a World War II veteran, duty defined Larry Taylor's life from his earliest days. As a young man, he volunteered to join the college ROTC unit at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Then, after graduating in 1966, he commissioned as an armor officer.

Larry had dreamed of leading in—leading men into battle on what he called "chariots of steel." But it didn't take many days on the ground for Larry to realize he belonged in the sky. He wanted to be a pilot. Not just any pilot, a Cobra pilot, flying the newest, fastest, deadliest Army helicopter at the time: a gunship built for only two people and their ammo.

So, when Larry was ordered—and when Larry was ordered—was offered a spot to fly in the Fighting First in Vietnam, he jumped at the chance. It was there that then-Lieutenant Taylor would go above and beyond the call of duty, quite literally.

June 18, 1968, it was pitch black—no moon, no stars, no light beyond the glow of Lieutenant Taylor's cockpit controls—when he heard a whisper come in through his radio: "We're surrounded. We're surrounded." That's what he heard.

The call had come from a four-man Army patrol unit just northeast of Saigon, a unit that included Sergeant David Hill. Earlier that day, the men had set out to recon the area. But in the dark, the men found themselves in the middle of the Vietnam—Viet Cong stronghold. Nearly a hundred enemy soldiers now encircled their unit.

The men picked up their radio and made a call. It was no longer a recon mission. They needed a rescue mission. Without hesitation, Lieutenant Taylor and his copilot began racing toward them. Over the radio, he laid out the gameplan. He would use his Cobra to give the unit cover until a rescue helicopter could extract them.

That was one—there was just one simple problem: It was pitch black. Lieutenant Taylor couldn't determine exactly where they were. So he asked his men to launch a flare, a move that would reveal their location to him, but also to the enemy. Lieutenant Taylor knew the risk, but he was ready. Over the radio, he said, "Let's get to work." The flare went up, and the flight—fight was on.

The enemy fire lit up the night. Lieutenant Taylor and his copilot dove down, positioning their Cobra nearly parallel with the Viet Cong fighters. They flew at dangerously low levels for more than a half an hour, firing thousands of rounds of rockets to cover the ground—cover the ground on which the men were.

Then, Lieutenant Taylor heard a sound that only meant one thing: His helo was hit. And then it was hit again and again and again. At that point, according to Army standards, he could have left the fight. But Lieutenant Taylor had his own sacred standard: Quote, "You never leave a man on the ground," end of quote.

He tried to find an escape route for the unit, his Cobra taking more rounds as he did. He kept trying to radio for a rescue, knowing that he and his men below were almost out of time and ammunition. On his last try, he learned that any attempt to save the men had been called off. The rescue helicopter was not coming.

Instead, Lieutenant Taylor received a direct order: "Return to base." His response was just as direct: "I'm getting my men out." "I'm getting my men out." Lieutenant Taylor would perform the extraction himself, a maneuver never before accomplished in a Cobra. Remember, the Cobra was only—a gunship only. It had no cabin for passengers. But that was the least of his problems.

First, Lieutenant Taylor needed to give his men a way out of the rice paddy where they had been pinned down. He needed diversion. So, despite the fact that he had no rockets or rounds left, Lieutenant Taylor drew the enemy fire himself. Using his landing light to trick the enemy into thinking he still had ammo, he started making runs on the Viet Cong fighters. The ruse worked a few times, but it was enough for the men to make it to the extraction point.

There, still under heavy gunfire, Lieutenant Taylor landed. The men mounted the exterior of his helo, clinging to the skids, climbing on the rocket pods. Within seconds, Lieutenant Taylor was back in the air.

But the mission wasn't over. Lieutenant Taylor saw his fuel light flickering. He had started off with sixteen—1,600 pounds of gas, and now he had about 6—not enough to make it back to base. Worse, the soldiers he was carrying were covered in wet mud and clinging to the Cobra

against 50-knot wind—knots of wind. Even if he could make it back to base, his men would freeze or fall first.

So he once more risked his own safety for his fellow teammates. He located a friendly area to set his bird down. The four men dismounted the helo and disappeared back into the pitch-black night. No moon. No stars. No light beyond the glow of their faces when they briefly turned and saluted Lieutenant Taylor for saving all four of their lives.

He wouldn't see some of these men again until 30 years later at Army reunions. By that time, Lieutenant Taylor had long become Captain Taylor. He had flown more than 2,000 combat missions. And he had received a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, and 43 Air Medals.

Thank God he's not putting them all on his chest. He'd have trouble standing. *[Laughter]*

Incredible. No, really, think about it. It's incredible.

But the greatest honor of all: Families showed up at these reunions too. They'd look for Larry. They'd hug him. They'd say, "You don't know me, but you saved my daddy's life."

In a few days, young soldiers about the same age as Larry was during the dark night in Vietnam, they'll arrive at Ranger School. Like all of us today, they're inspired by his story, and they will be. But how—by how he refused to give up. Refused to leave a fellow American behind. Refused to put his own life above the lives of others in need.

When duty called, Larry did everything—did everything—to answer. And because of that, he rewrote the fate of four families for generations to come.

That's valor. That's valor.

That's our Nation at its very best.

And that's why it's now my great honor to ask Lieutenant Colonel Ann Hughes to read your Medal of Honor citation.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

*[At this point, Lt. Col. Ann L. Hughes, USSF, Space Force Aide to the President, read the citation, and the President presented the medal, assisted by Lt. Col. Azizi V. Wesmiller, USA, Army Aide to the President.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Cody, WY, resident J.O. Ratliff, who served as Capt. Taylor's copilot and gunner during the operation described in the citation. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the citation.

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