

Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor

January 3, 2025

Please be seated. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, as the Commander in Chief, this is the most solemn occasion that I participated in in my 4 years every time we do this event.

Secretary Austin, Secretary Wormuth, Chairman Brown—General, it's good to see you—Representative Case, Castro, Ryan, and Takano, and, most importantly, veterans, servicemembers, and previous Medal of Honor recipients: Today is the final time as Commander in Chief and I'm deeply privileged to honor seven American—seven American heroes. And that's not hyperbole. These are genuine to their core heroes.

Heroes of different ranks, different positions, and even different generations. But heroes who all went above and beyond the call of duty. Heroes who all deserve our Nation's highest and oldest military recognition: the Medal of Honor.

First Private Bruno Orig. A proud son of Hawaii, Bruno joined the Army when he was just 19 years old. Less than 1 year later, he was completing a mission in Korea. Bruno saw his fellow soldiers were wounded and stranded under enemy fire. Without hesitation, he ran out to rescue them, giving his own life to save the lives of his brothers-in-arms. That's valor. That's the definition of valor.

Private First Class—you know, I think it's incredible when I think of the men and women who have done—who have gotten this award—but Private First Class Wataru Nakamura. After an attack on Pearl Harbor, he was forced to live in an internment camp, like so many other Japanese Americans—like my good friend Danny Inouye, who was a hero himself—put in an internment camp.

But still, he signed up to serve our Nation during World War II and the Korean War. During his last mission in May of 1951, single handedly, he defended his unit from enemy attack, fighting until he was killed by a grenade.

Corporal Fred McGee. A Midwesterner, a steelworker, and a gunner in one of the first integrated Army units of the Korean War. Fred embodied the very best of our country. In June 1952, his unit was attacked. They took casualties. They were ordered to fall back. But Fred refused—refused—to leave until he helped every wounded soldier evacuate.

Private First Class Charlie Johnson. Growing up, in the words of one of Charlie's high school classmate, "He was a heck of a football player." Well, back in 1952, Charlie signed up to serve in Korea, trading his jersey for a uniform. During one battle, he gave his life to defend a bunker full of his wounded soldiers. His valor saved 10 men, including an old high school classmate.

General Richard—excuse me—excuse me—Cavazos. A young first lieutenant in Korea, Richard led his men through a difficult and deadly mission in enemy territory. Eventually, he was ordered to retreat, but he stayed. He stayed, rescuing wounded soldiers one by one until every one of them was evacuated. Richard went on to serve for three decades in the Army, becoming the first—the country's first Hispanic four-star general.

And Captain Hugh Nelson. A Citadel graduate, helicopter pilot, and a proud young father. He was just 28 years old when he and his crew were shot down in Vietnam. Hugh freed his men who were trapped in the wreckage. Then, as the enemy began to attack, he used his body as a

shield to protect them. It cost him dearly. It cost him his life. Hugh's commanding officer called it the "ultimate act of self-sacrifice," which it was.

And finally, Private First Class Ken David, who is here with us today. Nearly 55 years ago, in Vietnam, his company was ambushed by the enemy. Ken's lieutenant was killed instantly. Then, Ken himself was hit in the back with shrapnel. But he couldn't and wouldn't give up. Instead, he shouted and fired his weapon the attacking—to attract attention to him, away from others and away from the wounded men. Imagine that courage. "Come get me. Come get me. Don't get those folks." That's selflessness.

Ken, I want to say to you that I wish I could say to every man we're honoring today: You're a hero. A genuine hero. A flat-out, straight-up American hero. And we owe you and the families owe you.

Let me close with this. I said—as I said earlier, these are my final days as Commander in Chief. It's been the greatest honor of my life to be entrusted with the greatest fighting force in the history of the world. They're the finest military in the history of the world. And every day—every day—their integrity, their patriotism, and their courage.

And to learn the stories of Americans like Bruno and Wataru and Fred and Charlie and Richard and Hugh, Ken: Americans who have not only fought for our Nation, but embodied the very best our Nation has to offer.

Let me also say this. Today we award these individuals the Medal of Honor. But we can't stop there. Together, as a nation, it's up to us to give this medal meaning. To keep fighting—to keep fighting—for one another, for each other; to keep defending everything these heroes fought for and many of them died for: the ideals of America, the freedom we cherish, the democracy that has made our progress possible.

And remember, we are the only nation in the world built on an idea. Every other nation is built based on geography, ethnicity, or religion. But we are the only nation based on an idea.

The idea is that we hold these truths evident—to be self-evident. All men and women are created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout their entire lives. We haven't always lived up to it, but we've never, ever, ever walked away from it.

Today, we must say clearly: We never, ever, ever will.

Now it's my great honor to ask Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Lichi—excuse me—Lichi the Medal of Honor—to read the Medal of Honor citations.

And thank you all for being here. And God bless you, and may God also protect our troops who are still engaged. Thank you.

[At this point, Lt. Cmdr. Anthony J. Lichi, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals, assisted by Lt. Col. Azizi V. Wesmiller, USA, Army Aide to the President.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:18 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Army Christine E. Wormuth; and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. "C.Q." Brown, Jr., USAF. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 7 and also included the reading of the citations.

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