

President Obama To Award Medal Of Honor To Two Dozen Veterans, Including 19 Discrimination Victims

Monday, February 24, 2014 | Scott Wilson, The Washington Post



The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force, which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States as presented to its recipient by the President of the United States of America in the name of Congress.



President Obama will correct a historical act of discrimination next month when he awards the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest commendation for combat valor, to a group of Hispanic, Jewish and African-American veterans who were passed over because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. The unusual presentation will culminate a 12-year Pentagon review ordered by Congress into past discrimination in the ranks and will hold a particular poignancy when conducted by the nation's first African-American president. Although the review predates Obama's tenure, he has made addressing discrimination in the military including ending the ban on gay and lesbian service members a priority as commander in chief.

With the ornate White House East Room as backdrop, the March 18 ceremony will mark another step to revisit a history of discrimination in the armed forces as the nation's demographics and social values shift rapidly. The recipients, whom the White House announced Friday afternoon, served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Collectively, their award ceremony will mark the single largest group of Medal of Honor recipients since World War II, when more than two dozen service members were honored in that conflict's last days.

Just three of the 24 veterans who will be honored are still alive. All but five of the soldiers are Hispanic, Jewish or African American, including Melvin Morris, a former Green Beret who was wounded three times on a mid-September day in 1969 recovering the body of his fatally wounded master sergeant from a jungle ambush in the Chi Lang district of South Vietnam. "I never thought much about it and didn't until recently," said Morris, 72, who was decorated three times for his service in Vietnam and retired from the Army after 22 years. "But I think that this is something the military always should address because, in almost every process we have, someone is overlooked."

The unusual historical accounting began in 2002 under the George W. Bush administration when Congress, as part of the military spending bill, ordered the Pentagon to look into whether Jewish and Hispanic service members had been passed over unfairly for the nation's highest military honor.

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Defense Department officials said there was specific evidence to suggest such discrimination may have existed in the ranks, including instances in which Hispanic and Jewish soldiers apparently changed their names to hide their ethnicity. The congressional order spanned the period from December 1941 through September 2001. The project was an enormous undertaking that sent military personnel officials searching for lost records and battlefield histories amid the complicated politics surrounding the military's highest honor. Officials from each service branch focused on service members who had been awarded the second-highest medal for gallantry: the Distinguished Service Cross for the Army, the Air Force Cross for that branch, and the Navy Cross for the Navy and Marine Corps. Although that narrowed the review, the Army alone identified more than 600 records that needed reassessment. The smaller branches found 275.

"It's hard to be awarded the medal for a single person, and to go back for all those potential candidates, that is a very demanding scope and record-retrieval task," said a defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to comment on the review. "It was very time-consuming. But we wanted to make sure that, as a process, we did it correctly and that the Medal of Honor process itself was honored." Many of the veterans under review had passed away, making interviews impossible. Much of the review relied on existing information and comparisons to Medal of Honor recipients, but even then, there were challenges unforeseen when the project began.

In 1973, a fire tore through the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, destroying as many as 18 million military personnel files. Among those were Army service records from 1912 through 1960, a period that included World War II and Korea. The Air Force lost most of its personnel files from 1947 through 1964. The disaster forced officials to recreate the military history of scores of potential candidates for the upgraded commendation by interviewing family members, fellow battlefield soldiers, and others. The reassessment sent a host of candidates through the various service boards that decide on Medal of Honor recipients and then to the Joint Chiefs for approval. Two dozen veterans — all from the Army — emerged as worthy of an upgrade to the Medal of Honor.

They include 17 Hispanic soldiers such as Santiago J. Erevia, a former specialist four who served in Vietnam as a radio telephone operator in Company C, 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 501st Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division. He will receive the Medal of Honor at the March 18 ceremony for "courageous actions" during a search-and-clear mission near Tam Ky, Vietnam. "We've wondered why he didn't receive it the first time and thought it may have been because of his name," said Jesse Erevia, 41, his son, who lives in San Antonio, not far from his father. Erevia said his father had "some issues" with the Vietnam War, mainly concerning its rationale, and has mixed feelings about military honors in general. But the family is eager to attend the White House ceremony to see him receive an award they have long felt he deserved. "He's never let me down," Erevia, a tamale salesman, said. "His are big shoes to fill."

The third living veteran is Jose Rodela, a former sergeant first class from Corpus Christi, Tex., who will receive the medal for bravery during fighting in Phuoc Long province, Vietnam, in early September 1969.

The review identified one deceased Jewish veteran, former Pfc. Leonard M. Kravitz, to receive the Medal of Honor. In early March 1951, Kravitz was serving as an assistant machine gunner with Company M, 5th Infantry Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division. His actions in combat over two days in Yangpyong, Korea, were deemed worthy of the highest honor. "In this instance, justice was delayed but not denied," Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said Friday in a statement.

Morris was the only African-American veteran identified as part of the review. The initial congressional order did not include black service members for reassessment, but it was later amended to allow others deserving an upgraded commendation — not just Hispanic or Jewish service members — to receive one.

Morris grew up in small-town Oklahoma, the son of a "do-it-all carpenter" and a housemaid. He joined the Army because at the time, he recalled, "it was the prestigious thing to do, and if you got in, you went." As part of a Special Forces A Team carrying out search-and-destroy missions with local Montagnard troops, Morris was ambushed on Sept. 17, 1969, on a jungle patrol. His company commander was shot through the mouth and throat, his operations sergeant was severely wounded by a land mine and his master sergeant, Ronald P. Hague, was killed. "We were a tight crew and we didn't leave anyone behind," Morris said. He took soldiers to retrieve Hague's body three times before succeeding. He said last rites over his friend and then was shot through the chest, the arm, and the ring finger — tearing it off along with his wedding band. After recuperating in a stateside hospital, Morris returned to Vietnam for another tour, this time as the recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross. "I never thought about the medal, whether it should have been another higher one," he said. "I just kept doing what I was doing." Morris said he did not consider whether his race played a part in the commendation selection. He was not blind to race; Morris recalled being unable to use the public drinking fountain outside the Southern base where he trained for Special Forces. "This is wonderful," he said. "I'm overwhelmed. And there are more out there." Morris said he will travel from his Florida home to the White House next month with his three children and his wife of more than five decades, Mary, who gave him the ring that was shot off with his finger that day in Vietnam. "I haven't worn one since," he said.

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Of the two dozen soldiers in the White House announcement, five identified themselves on military personnel forms as "Caucasian." Military officials said their ethnicity or religious affiliation is uncertain, but their battlefield actions were found to deserve the highest honor.

The 'Perks' Of A Medal Of Honor

Larry Shaughnessy, CNN Pentagon Producer

When President Obama hangs the Medal of Honor around one's neck, one will instantly take his place in history. For as long as he lives he will be accorded the same respect enjoyed by America's top military officers. But history and respect are just part of what comes with being the recipient of the nation's highest decoration for bravery on the battlefield.

Living Medal of Honor recipients are entitled to benefits most service members don't get -- what in the corporate world would be called "perks." But make no mistake, these heroes don't risk their lives on the battlefield for "perks." They will say they aren't heroes and what they did to earn the medal they did for their buddies, their comrades in arms -- not for a decoration. But, nonetheless, this country affords these heroes with many "perks." Here are just a few of the lifetime benefits.

The first is more money. The Department of Veterans Affairs gives them a \$1,194 monthly pension. Plus there is a 10 percent increase in their retirement pay, provided it doesn't exceed the maximum allowed by law. The recipients also get to fly on military aircraft at no cost, if there is space available, and they and their families can use military recreation facilities like pools, bowling allies and golf courses. Recipients are also invited to all presidential inaugurations and the inauguration balls.

There are also less formal benefits. For example, many military bases set aside a special parking space for Medal of Honor winners. There is an informal tradition that regardless of a service member's rank, even the top officers in the military salute them, rather than vice versa. And many states, including California, Iowa and Wisconsin, have special license plates that only a Medal of Honor recipient can put on his car, and some of those states waive the usual fees. Each Medal of Honor recipient's child, if they qualify, can go to a military academy without having to worry about the quota for his or her state.

Finally, upon their death, a Medal of Honor recipient's grave is marked with a special headstone that bears the Medal of Honor symbol and special gold lettering to denote that service member's special status.

1. In appropriate paragraph form, compare and contrast the pros and cons synonymous with an inadvertent delay in receiving the nation's highest commendation for combat valor. Many have since argued the current presidential administration is inappropriately deriving credit from an ambitious antidiscrimination incentive launched approximately 12 years prior geared towards whether Jewish and Hispanic service members had been passed over unfairly for the nation's highest military honor. Regardless, the aforementioned distinguished veterans will receive the recognition they've long deserved. Provided the benefits afforded to Medal of Honor recipients, how may the government appropriately compensate these war heroes provided the decades of neglected they've inadvertently endured? Thoroughly explain your reasoning and provide specific artifacts and evidence *not* limited solely to article above to support your response. Create and illustrate a Venn Diagram to effectively explore relationships and patterns and to make arguments about relationships between sets.

(LA.910.3.2.2; LA.910.1.6.2; MA.912.D.7.2; MA.912.A.10.1)

The following inquiries are in honor of the heroic actions employed by the four distinguished Medal of Honor recipients in the Iraq War.

2. According to the official report, on the afternoon of Dec. 4, 2006, McGinnis' platoon was on mounted patrol in Adhamiyah, Iraq to restrict enemy movement and quell sectarian violence. During the course of the patrol, an unidentified insurgent positioned on a rooftop nearby threw a fragmentation grenade into the Humvee. Without hesitation or regard for his own life, 19-year-old McGinnis threw his back over the grenade, pinning it between his body and the Humvee's radio mount. McGinnis absorbed all lethal fragments and the concussive effects of the grenade with his own body. Assume for a moment that the grenade infiltrated the vehicle rendered the following results: (-3, 3), (-1, 0), and (1, -3). Write a function rule to describe this relationship and create a table of values. Is the equation a direct variation? Find the constant of the variation. Identify the domain and range of each relation. Identify the dependent and independent variables. Create a table, graph the data and label each section, create a mapping diagram, and determine whether a function exists via the Vertical-Line Test. **(MA.912.A.1.4; MA.912.A.2.13; MA.912.A.10.1; MA.912.A.2.2; MA.912.A.2.3; MA.912.A.2.4)**



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3. On April 14, 2004, 3 days after Easter Sunday, Corporal Dunham was manning a checkpoint in Karabilah, Iraq, when an insurgent leapt from his car and began choking Corporal Dunham. A



scuffle ensued as two Marines approached to help. Reportedly, the last words from Corporal Dunham were, "No, No. Watch his hand." Suddenly, the insurgent dropped a grenade. Corporal Dunham took off his Kevlar helmet, dropped to the ground, and covered the explosive as best he could. The blast seriously wounded all 3 Marines. Eight days later, Corporal Jason L. Dunham died at Bethesda Naval Hospital from wounds he received in the incident. He was 22. Assume for a moment Corporal Dunham previously monitored the insurgents mannerisms and patterns of movement in a manner comparable to the game of chess where six different kinds of pieces are translated in accordance to rather unique rules. The Knight is only authorized to move in an "L" shape similar to a right angle. It moves two spaces horizontally or vertically and then one additional square perpendicular to its original

direction where it intersects with the aforementioned insurgent. Illustrate a diagram and use coordinate notation to describe two translations a knight may employ to initiate contact with an insurgent. Explain why the term congruence transformation is used in describing translations, reflections, and rotations. Explain your reasoning in determining whether a point or line be its own image under a transformation? (MA.912.G.1.2; MA.912.G.2.2; MA.912.G.2.3; MA.912.G.2.4)

4. SEAL Team Three, Delta Platoon was sent to Iraq in April 2006 and assigned to train Iraqi Army soldiers in Ramadi. Over the next five months, Monsoor and his platoon frequently engaged in



combat with insurgent forces. On September 29, 2006 an insurgent threw a grenade onto a rooftop where Monsoor and several other SEAL and Iraqi soldiers were positioned. Monsoor quickly smothered the grenade with his body, absorbing the resulting explosion and saving his comrades from serious injury or death. Monsoor died about 30 minutes later from serious wounds caused by the grenade explosion. Assume for a moment that Monsoor and his associates were located 15 feet from the insurgent responsible for throwing the explosive detonation device. Two of the warriors were 24 feet from each other adjacent to the boundaries of the training site. Employ the Perpendicular Bisector Theorem, its converse and concurrency of Perpendicular Bisectors of a Triangle to determine how far the

insurgent was located from the training site boundary. Illustrate the diagram and identify concurrent lines and the point of concurrency (MA.912.G.1.2; MA.912.G.4.1 - MA.912.G.4.6)

5. On April 4, 2003, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, attacked to seize



Objective Lions, the Baghdad International Airport. Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith fired from the advancing enemy from the unprotected position atop the APC and expended at least three boxes of ammunition before being mortally wounded by enemy fire. The enemy attack was defeated. Sgt. 1st Class Smith's actions saved the lives of at least 100 Soldiers, caused the failure of a deliberate enemy attack hours after 1st Brigade seized the Baghdad Airport, and resulted in an estimated 50 enemy soldiers killed. The amount of ammunition dispensed from a weapon varies directly with the number of rounds passing through the chamber. The M2 .50 caliber machine gun discharges up to 550 rounds per minute. Suppose the weapon was fired a maximum capacity for 6 minutes. Write a

function relating the rounds fired r to the amount of time t . Is this a direct variation? (MA.912.A.1.4; MA.912.A.2.13; MA.912.A.10.1; MA.912.A.2.2; MA.912.A.2.3; MA.912.A.2.4)

6. Using contextual clues only, determine the most complete and accurate definitions of following italicized terms: *commendation*, *valor*, *ethnic*, *culminate*, *poignancy*, *predates*, *ambush*, *ornate*, *undertaking*, *amid*, *gallantry*, *reassessment*, *anonymity*, *unforeseen*, *rationale*, *amended*, *prestigious*, and *inaugurations* as obtained from the passage above. Additionally, use each word in a complete sentence to demonstrate further comprehension. (LA.910.1.6.3; LA.910.1.6.1)

7. **SARASOTA MILITARY ACADEMY WORD-OF-THE-WEEK** Provided the fact that this story is incomplete, create an updated concluding paragraph aligned with the passage above incorporating the italicized term: *Sundry* adj. Various; Several; Miscellaneous. (LA.910.1.6.1; LA.910.1.6.5)

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