

Four Vietnam War Vets Receive Medals of Honor

In July, President Joe Biden presented the top military medal to the three surviving Army veterans and the family of a soldier who died during his tour

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Four Vietnam War veterans were each presented the Medal of Honor by President Joe Biden at a July White House ceremony some 50 years after their heroic actions during the war.

Following are the Vietnam War soldiers who each earned the Medal of Honor:

Spc. 5 Dwight W. Birdwell
25th Infantry Division

Birdwell was born in Amarillo, Texas, and grew up near the town of Bell in eastern Oklahoma, which is in the state's Cherokee Nation. Birdwell, a citizen of the indigenous tribe, was assigned as a tanker to C Troop, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav, 25th Inf. Div., when he earned the Medal of Honor.

On Jan. 31, 1968, enemy forces assaulted Birdwell's unit during the Tet Offensive attack at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, located near Saigon — known today as Ho Chi Minh City. During the firefight, the armored crewmembers' commander was wounded. Birdwell took command of his unit and ordered fire on enemy forces until the tank ran out of ammunition. Birdwell then fetched an M-60 machine gun and continued the attack on enemy troops, according to the Army.

During the fight, enemy fire damaged Birdwell's machine gun and wounded his face and torso. While wounded, Birdwell "ran through enemy fire" to retrieve more ammunition for his unit, according to the Army.

After his unit received reinforcement, Birdwell helped evacuate wounded members of his unit before he was ordered to "seek attention for his wounds."

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Maj. John J. Duffy
5th Special Forces Group

Duffy, who retired from the Army, was a part of the 5th Special Forces Group during his four Vietnam tours. A special advisor with the Military Assistance Command Vietnam Team 162, Duffy was assigned to South Vietnam's airborne division, according to the Army.

On April 14, 1972, Duffy ordered troops to defend Fire Support Base Charlie — located in central Vietnam — which was surrounded by a “battalion-sized enemy element,” according to the citation. Troops at “Charlie 2” were unable to establish a safe landing zone for aircraft to deliver supplies to the base.

Duffy earned the Medal of Honor after he moved close to enemy antiaircraft positions to call in an airstrike. According to Duffy's citation, he was again wounded when he was hit by fragments from enemy rifle fire and refused evacuation.

During the battle, which continued through April 15, Duffy assisted in moving wounded troops to an established evacuation area. Duffy's Medal of Honor citation claimed that he boarded an aircraft for the medical evacuation “only after ensuring all the wounded were aboard the aircraft.” Duffy also administered aid to a wounded helicopter door gunner, according to his citation.

Spec. 5 Dennis M. Fujii
67th Med Group

Fujii, born on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, earned the Medal of Honor during a five-day battle in Laos.

While serving as a crew chief aboard a helicopter during an evacuation mission on Feb. 18, 1971, enemy fire struck Fujii's aircraft during its landing. He and medics pulled wounded South Vietnamese troops into the medevac helicopter.

However, during the attempted takeoff, the aircraft was hit by an enemy mortar round, which exploded through the helicopter and caused the aircraft to crash. While Fujii sought cover from enemy fire, shrapnel from a mortar round struck the Medal of Honor recipient in one of his shoulders, according to the Army.

Less than an hour later, a U.S. helicopter landed near the location of Fujii and other survivors. They ran toward the helicopter, but Fujii was hit by shrapnel in one of his eyes while trying to reach the aircraft. Fujii was left alone on the battlefield, according to his Medal of Honor citation.

While near the crash site for five days, Fujii attended to wounded South Vietnamese soldiers and ignored his own wounds, according to the Army. Fujii also directed air strikes on the battlefield

after finding a radio transmitter.

Fujii was rescued by a helicopter on Feb. 22.

Staff Sgt. Edward N. Kaneshiro
1st Cavalry Division

Kaneshiro, who was born in Honolulu, earned the Medal of Honor during a mission on Dec. 1, 1966, in South Vietnam's Kim Son Valley.

A part of C Troop, 1st Sqdn. 9th Cav Regt., 1st Cav Div., Kaneshiro's unit was attacked by North Vietnamese troops. A machine gun attack killed two soldiers and wounded four others, according to Kaneshiro's Medal of Honor citation.

Kaneshiro, an infantryman, counterattacked by crawling toward enemy forces, throwing six grenades and firing his M16 rifle. The first grenade thrown killed an enemy machine gunner. With his rifle and remaining grenades, Kaneshiro eliminated three enemy soldiers, according to his citation.

Kaneshiro's actions, according to the Medal of Honor citation, ensured the "orderly extrication and reorganization of the platoon." The Army claimed Kaneshiro's actions saved members of his unit and made the overall mission a success.

Kaneshiro was later killed by an enemy gunshot wound on March 6, 1967.

This article is featured in the 2023 January issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.