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Last Updated: 04/01/2025

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 23, 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: KEN KHACHIGIAN

Herewith the clean typewritten version of your remarks for the Medal of Honor ceremony. I have only a couple of suggestions.

Some might cavil at the idea that they came home "without victory" because the government had not permitted them to win. In some ways, this tends to substantiate the claim of the left that we "lost the war."

Toward the end of the war, we did considerably enhance our military capability -- increased bombings, mining etc. Not to mention the December bombings which brought the North to the final peace agreement. I would suggest this wording: "They came home without unconditional victory, not because they had been defeated, but because at times our Government refused to take actions that would permit them to win." That is changed enough to take the sting out.

On page 1, we would suggest adding to the 57,000 killed, the more than 300,000 wounded. This gives them due credit as well.

On page 2, we made a technical correction on the spelling of Hoa Khanh (two words). Incidentally, the Vietnamese pronunciation of Hoa is "Wah."

We are also attaching reading copy of the citation. When we get your final version of the remarks back tomorrow morning, we will immediately type them onto cards and can have them back to you by the end of your meeting with Foreign Minister Shamir.

Finally, I am attaching some remarks for this ceremony that were done by Tony Dolan of our staff. There are some very good thoughts in it that I wanted you to have in case you would like to supplement your own.

Medal of Honor Ceremony
EVENT

Feb 24, 1981
DELIVERY DATE

	<u>DUE</u>
DRAFT/KK	<u>Sat - C.O.B. 2/21</u>
FINAL	
DATE:	<u>Mon 2/23</u>
TIME:	<u>3pm</u>
OFFICE:	<u>DD</u>

RECEIVED

Date:

Feb 12, 1981

Office:

WRITER:

TD

NOTES:

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 24, 1981

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT
MEDAL OF HONOR CEREMONY

The Pentagon

1:45 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Men and women of the armed forces, ladies and gentlemen, several years ago, we brought home a group of American fighting men who had obeyed their country's call and who had fought as bravely and as well as any Americans in our history. They came home without a victory not because they'd been defeated but because they'd been denied permission to win. (Applause.)

They were greeted by no parades, no bands, no waving of the flag they had so nobly served. There's been no thank you for their sacrifice. There's been no effort to honor and, thus, give pride to the families of more than 57,000 young men who gave their lives in that far away war.

As the poet Lawrence Binyon wrote, "They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn. But the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them."

Pride, of course, can not wipe out the burden of grief borne by their families, but it can make that grief easier to bear. The pain will not be quite as sharp if they know their fellow citizens share that pain.

There's been little or no recognition of the gratitude we owe to the more than 300,000 men who suffered wounds in that war. John Stuart Mill~~s~~ said, "War is an ugly thing but not the ugliest of things. A man who has nothing which he cares about more than his personal safety is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

Back in 1970, Kenneth Y. Tomlinson wrote of what he had seen our young men do beyond and above the call of military duty in Vietnam -- a marine from Texas on his way in at dawn from an all night patrol stopping to treat huge sores on the back of an old Vietnamese man, an artillery man from New Jersey spending his free time stacking sandbags at an orphanage to protect the children from mortar attacks, an army engineer from California distributing toys he'd bought in Hong Kong to the orphans his unit had adopted. One senior military officer told Tomlinson, "My hardest task is keeping track of the incurable humanitarianism of our troops." None of the recent movies about that war have found time to show those examples of humanitarianism. In 1969 alone, the United States Army Volunteers helped construct 1253 schools and 597 hospitals and dispensaries, contributing \$300,000 from their own pockets. Marines from the Third Amphibious Force helped build 268 classrooms, 75 dispensaries, 78 churches, temples and pagodas. Marines contributed \$40,000 to insure an education for 935 children. Air force men gave their money and their own labor to 1218 schools, medical facilities and orphanages. Air force doctors, dentists, and medics, treated 390,000 Vietnamese in volunteer programs.

MORE

At Hoa Khanh, Children's Hospital treated in that one year, some 16,000 children, many of whom might have died without the hospital. One of the finest and most modern in the Far East, it was built and financed with money raised by combat marines.

An 11-year-old boy burned over three quarters of his body was one of those saved. He interrupted the game he was playing with visiting marines to say, "All my life, I will never forget this place and these healing people. Some way, I will repay them."

A 27 year old chaplain from Springfield, Missouri, came upon an orphanage where 60 children were sleeping on the floor of a school and subsisting on one or two bowls of rice a day. He told some men of the Americal Divisions Fifth Battalion, 46th Infantry, about what he'd seen. A veteran sergeant said, "Don't worry, Chaplain. Those kids have just got themselves some new parents." And they had.

Army combat troops began sacking enemy food they had captured and shipping them back on returning helicopters. They found cots in a salvage dump, repaired them and soon the children were sleeping in beds for the first time. One day, the cup was passed. Marines earmarked 10 percent of all poker winnings and by the end of the year, the orphans were in a new building.

An air force pilot saw 240 lepers living in unimaginable filth. Soon there were volunteers from all branches of the military spending their weekends building houses at a hospital.

MORE

The stories go on and on. A Green Beret learned that a mother in a remote mountain village was having trouble in childbirth. He made his way to her home, carried her to a truck, and raced to **Camranh** where a Navy doctor delivered her baby. On Christmas he gave 1,500 orphans toothpaste, soap, candy, and nuts he had collected from fellow servicemen.

Bob Hope, who visited our men there as he had in two previous wars, said of them, "The number of our GI's who devote their free time, money, and energy to aid the Vietnamese would surprise you." And then he added, "But maybe it wouldn't. I guess you know what kind of guys your sons and brothers and the kids next door are."

Well, yes, we do know. I think we just let it slip our minds for a time. It is time to show our pride in them and to thank them.

In his book, The Bridges of Toko-Ri, novelist James Michener writes movingly of the heroes who fought in the Korean Conflict. In the book's final scene an admiral stands on the darkened bridge of his carrier waiting for pilots he knows will never return from their mission. And as he waits he asks in the silent darkness, "Where did we get such men?" Almost a generation later, I asked that same question when our POW's were returned from savage captivity in Vietnam. "Where did we find such men?" We find them where we have always found them, in our villages and towns, on our city streets, in our shops and on our farms.

I have one more Vietnam story, and the individual in this story was brought up on a farm outside Curo in DeWitt County, Texas, and he is here today. Thanks to the Secretary of Defense, Cap Weinberger, I learned of his story which had been overlooked or buried for several years. It has to do with the highest award our nation can give, the Congressional Medal of Honor, given only for service above and beyond the call of duty.

Secretary Weinberger, would you please escort Sergeant Benavidez forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are honored to have with us today Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, U.S. Army, Retired. Let me read the plain, factual military language of the citation that was lost for too long a time.

Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, United States Army, Retired, for conspicuous gallantry and entrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Where there is a brave man, it is said, there is the thickest of the fight, there is the place of honor.

MORE

On May 2, 1968, Master Sergeant, then Staff Sergeant, Roy P. Benavidez, distinguished himself by a series of daring and extremely valorous actions while assigned to Detachment D-56, Fifth Special Forces Group, Airborne, First Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of May 2, 1968, a twelve-man Special Forces reconnaissance team was inserted by helicopters in a dense jungle area west of Loch Ninh, Vietnam to gather intelligence information about confirmed large-scale enemy activity.

This area was controlled and routinely patrolled by the North Vietnamese army. After a short period of time on the ground, the team met heavy enemy resistance and requested emergency extraction. Three helicopters attempted extraction but were unable to land due to intense enemy small arms and anti-aircraft fire. Sergeant Benavidez was at the forward operating base in Loch Minh monitoring the operation by radio when these helicopters returned to offload wounded crew members and to assess aircraft damage.

Sergeant Benavidez voluntarily boarded a returning aircraft to assist in another extraction attempt. Realizing that all the team members were either dead or wounded and unable to move to the pickup zone, he directed the aircraft to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter and ran approximately 75 meters under withering small arms fire to the crippled team.

Prior to reaching the team's position, he was wounded in his right leg, face and head. Despite these painful injuries, he took charge, repositioning the team members and directing their fire to facilitate the landing of an extraction aircraft and the loading of wounded and dead team members.

He then threw smoke canisters to direct the aircraft to the team's position. Despite his severe wounds and under intense enemy fire, he carried and dragged half of the wounded team members to the awaiting aircraft. He then provided protective fire by running along side the aircraft as it moved to pick up the remaining team members. As the enemy's fire intensified, he hurried to recover the body and the classified documents on the dead team leader. When he reached the team leader's body, Sergeant Benavidez was severely wounded by small arms fire in the abdomen and grenade fragments in his back.

At nearly the same moment, the aircraft pilot was mortally wounded and his helicopter crashed. Although in extremely critical condition due to his multiple wounds, Sergeant Benavidez secured the classified documents and made his way back to the wreckage where he aided the wounded out of the overturned aircraft and gathered the stunned survivors into a defensive perimeter.

Under increasing enemy automatic weapons and grenade fire, he moved around the perimeter distributing water and ammunition to his weary men reinstilling in them a will to live and fight. Facing a buildup of enemy opposition with a beleaguered team, Sergeant Benavidez mustered his strength and began calling in tactical airstrikes and directing the fire from supporting gunships to suppress the enemy's fire and so permit another extraction attempt.

He was wounded again in his thigh by small arms fire while administering first aid to a wounded team member just before another extraction helicopter was able to land.

MORE

His indomitable spirit kept him going as he began to carry his comrades to the craft.

On his second trip with the wounded, he was clubbed from behind by an enemy soldier. In the ensuing hand-to-hand combat he sustained additional wounds to his head and arms before killing his adversary. He then continued under devastating fire to carry the wounded to the helicopter. Upon reaching the aircraft he spotted and killed two enemy soldiers who were rushing the craft from an angle that prevented the aircraft door-gunner from firing upon them. With little strength remaining, he made one last trip to the perimeter to insure that all classified material had been collected or destroyed and to bring in the remaining wounded.

Only then, in serious condition from numerous wounds and loss of blood, did he allow himself to be pulled into the extraction aircraft.

Sergeant Benavidez's galant choice to join voluntarily his comrades who were in critical straits, to expose himself constantly to withering enemy fire and his refusal to be stopped despite numerous severe wounds, saved the lives of at least eight men.

His fearless personal leadership, tenacious devotion to duty and extremely valorous actions in the face of overwhelming odds, were in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army.

Sergeant Benavidez, a nation grateful to you and to all your comrades living and dead, awards with highest symbol of gratitude for service above and beyond the call of duty, the Congressional Medal of Honor. (Applause)

(Presentation of Congressional Medal of Honor)

END

2:00 P.M. EST

MEDAL OF HONOR CEREMONY -- FEBRUARY 24, 1981

SEVERAL YEARS AGO WE BROUGHT HOME A GROUP OF AMERICAN FIGHTING MEN WHO HAD OBEYED THEIR COUNTRY'S CALL AND WHO HAD FOUGHT AS BRAVELY AND AS WELL AS ANY AMERICANS IN OUR HISTORY. THEY CAME HOME WITHOUT A VICTORY, NOT BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN DEFEATED BUT BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN DENIED PERMISSION TO WIN.

THEY WERE GREETED BY NO PARADES, NO BANDS, NO WAVING OF THE FLAG THEY HAD SO NOBLY SERVED. THERE HAS BEEN NO "THANK YOU" FOR THEIR SACRIFICE. THERE HAS BEEN NO EFFORT

TO HONOR AND THUS GIVE PRIDE TO THE FAMILIES OF MORE THAN
57,000 YOUNG MEN WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THAT FAR AWAY WAR.

"THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD, AS WE THAT ARE LEFT GROW OLD:

"AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM, NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN.

"AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING,

"WE WILL REMEMBER THEM."

PRIDE, OF COURSE, CANNOT WIPE OUT THE BURDEN OF GRIEF
BORNE BY THEIR FAMILIES BUT IT CAN MAKE THAT GRIEF EASIER

TO BEAR. THE PAIN WILL NOT BE QUITE AS SHARP IF THEY KNOW THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS SHARE THAT PAIN.

THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE OR NO RECOGNITION OF THE GRATITUDE WE OWE TO THE MORE THAN 300,000 MEN WHO SUFFERED WOUNDS IN THAT WAR.

JOHN STUART MILL SAID: WAR IS AN UGLY THING. BUT NOT THE UGLIEST OF THINGS. A MAN WHO HAS NOTHING WHICH HE CARES ABOUT MORE THAN HIS PERSONAL SAFETY IS A MISERABLE CREATURE AND HAS NO CHANCE OF BEING FREE UNLESS MADE AND KEPT SO BY THE EXERTIONS OF BETTER MEN THAN HIMSELF.

BACK IN 1970 KENNETH Y. TOMLINSON WROTE OF WHAT HE HAD SEEN OUR YOUNG MEN DO BEYOND THE CALL OF MILITARY DUTY IN VIETNAM. A MARINE FROM TEXAS ON HIS WAY IN AT DAWN FROM AN ALL NIGHT PATROL STOPPING TO TREAT HUGE SORES ON THE BACK OF AN OLD VIETNAMESE MAN. AN ARTILLERY MAN FROM NEW JERSEY SPENDING HIS FREE TIME STACKING SAND BAGS AT AN ORPHANAGE TO PROTECT THE CHILDREN FROM MORTAR ATTACKS. AN ARMY ENGINEER FROM CALIFORNIA DISTRIBUTING TOYS HE HAD BOUGHT IN HONG KONG TO THE ORPHANS HIS UNIT HAS ADOPTED.

ONE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICER TOLD TOMLINSON, "MY HARDEST TASK IS KEEPING TRACK OF THE INCURABLE HUMANITARIANISM OF OUR TROOPS."

NONE OF THE RECENT MOVIES ABOUT THAT WAR HAVE FOUND TIME TO SHOW THAT HUMANITARIANISM. IN 1969 ALONE, U.S. ARMY VOLUNTEERS HELPED CONSTRUCT 1,253 SCHOOLS AND 597 HOSPITALS AND DISPENSARIES, CONTRIBUTING \$300,000 FROM THEIR OWN POCKETS. MARINES FROM THE 3RD AMPHIBIOUS FORCE HELPED BUILD 268 CLASSROOMS, 75 DISPENSARIES, AND 78 CHURCHES, TEMPLES AND PAGODAS. MARINES CONTRIBUTED \$40,000 TO ENSURE AN EDUCATION FOR 935 CHILDREN. AIR FORCE MEN GAVE MONEY AND THEIR OWN LABOR TO 1,218 SCHOOLS, MEDICAL FACILITIES AND ORPHANAGES. AIR FORCE DOCTORS, DENTISTS AND MEDICS TREATED 390,000 VIETNAMESE IN VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS.

THE HOA KHANH CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL TREATED IN THAT ONE YEAR SOME 16,000 CHILDREN, MANY OF WHOM MIGHT HAVE DIED WITHOUT THAT HOSPITAL. ONE OF THE FINEST AND MOST MODERN IN THE FAR EAST, IT WAS BUILT AND FINANCED WITH MONEY RAISED BY COMBAT MARINES. AN 11-YEAR-OLD BOY BURNED OVER THREE-QUARTERS OF HIS BODY WAS ONE OF THOSE SAVED. HE INTERRUPTED THE GAME HE WAS PLAYING WITH VISITING MARINES TO SAY: "ALL MY LIFE I WILL NEVER FORGET THIS PLACE AND THESE HEALING PEOPLE. SOME WAY I WILL REPAY THEM."

A 27-YEAR-OLD CHAPLAIN FROM SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI CAME UPON AN ORPHANAGE WHERE 60 CHILDREN WERE SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR OF A SCHOOL AND SUBSISTING ON TWO BOWLS OF RICE A DAY. HE TOLD SOME MEN OF THE AMERICAL DIVISION'S 5TH BATTALION, 46TH INFANTRY ABOUT WHAT HE'D SEEN. A VETERAN SERGEANT SAID, "DON'T WORRY CHAPLAIN, THOSE KIDS HAVE JUST GOT THEMSELVES SOME NEW PARENTS." AND THEY HAD. ARMY COMBAT TROOPS BEGAN SACKING ENEMY FOOD SUPPLIES THEY CAPTURED AND SHIPPING THEM BACK ON RETURNING HELICOPTORS. THEY FOUND COTS IN A SALVAGE DUMP, REPAIRED THEM AND SOON THE CHILDREN WERE SLEEPING IN BEDS FOR THE FIRST TIME. ON PAY DAY THE CUP.

WAS PASSED. MARINES EARMARKED 10 PERCENT OF ALL POKER WINNINGS AND BY THE END OF THE YEAR THE ORPHANS WERE IN A NEW BUILDING.

AN AIR FORCE PILOT SAW 240 LEPERS LIVING IN UNIMAGINABLE FILTH. SOON THERE WERE VOLUNTEERS FROM ALL BRANCHES OF THE MILITARY SPENDING THEIR WEEKENDS BUILDING HOUSES AND A HOSPITAL.

THE STORIES GO ON AND ON. A GREEN BERET LEARNED THAT A MOTHER IN A REMOTE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE WAS HAVING TROUBLE IN CHILDBIRTH. HE MADE HIS WAY TO HER HOME, CARRIED HER

TO A TRUCK AND RACED TO CAMRANH, WHERE A NAVY DOCTOR DELIVERED THE BABY. ON CHRISTMAS HE GAVE 1,500 ORPHANS TOOTHPASTE, SOAP, CANDY AND NUTS HE HAD COLLECTED FROM FELLOW SERVICEMEN.

BOB HOPE, WHO VISITED OUR MEN AS HE HAD IN TWO PREVIOUS WARS, SAID OF THEM: "THE NUMBER OF OUR G.I.s WHO DEVOTE THEIR FREE TIME, ENERGY AND MONEY TO AID THE VIETNAMESE WOULD SURPRISE YOU. BUT MAYBE IT WOULDN'T," HE ADDED. "I GUESS YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF GUYS YOUR SONS AND BROTHERS AND THE KIDS NEXT DOOR ARE."

YES WE DO KNOW. I THINK WE JUST LET IT SLIP OUR MINDS FOR A WHILE. IT IS TIME TO SHOW OUR PRIDE IN THEM AND TO THANK THEM.

IN HIS BOOK, THE BRIDGES AT TOKO-RI, NOVELIST JAMES MICHENER WRITES MOVINGLY OF THE HEROES WHO FOUGHT IN THE KOREAN CONFLICT.

IN THE BOOK'S FINAL SCENE, AN ADMIRAL STANDS ON THE DARKENED BRIDGE OF HIS CARRIER WAITING FOR PILOTS HE KNOWS WILL NEVER RETURN FROM THEIR MISSION. AND AS HE WAITS HE ASKS IN THE SILENT DARKNESS: "WHERE DID WE GET SUCH MEN?"

ALMOST A GENERATION LATER I ASKED THAT SAME QUESTION WHEN OUR P.O.W.s WERE RETURNED FROM SAVAGE CAPTIVITY IN VIETNAM. WHERE DID WE FIND SUCH MEN? WE FIND THEM WHERE WE'VE ALWAYS FOUND THEM: IN OUR VILLAGES AND TOWNS, ON OUR CITY STREETS, IN OUR SHOPS AND ON OUR FARMS.

I HAVE ONE MORE STORY AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN THIS STORY WAS BROUGHT UP ON A FARM OUTSIDE CUREO IN DE WITT COUNTY, TEXAS. HE IS HERE TODAY. THANKS TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, CAP WEINBERGER, I LEARNED OF THIS STORY WHICH HAD BEEN OVERLOOKED OR BURIED FOR SEVERAL YEARS. IT HAS TO DO WITH

THE HIGHEST AWARD OUR NATION CAN GIVE -- THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR -- GIVEN ONLY FOR SERVICE "ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY."

SECRETARY WEINBERGER, WOULD YOU PLEASE ESCORT SERGEANT BENAVIDEZ FORWARD.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE ARE HONORED TO HAVE WITH US MASTER SERGEANT ROY P. BENAVIDEZ, U.S. ARMY, RETIRED.

LET ME READ THE PLAIN, FACTUAL MILITARY LANGUAGE OF THE CITATION THAT WAS LOST FOR TOO LONG A TIME. (READ CITATION)

From the President's
Handwritten Copy
February 23, 1981

MEDAL OF HONOR CEREMONY: February 24, 1981

Several years ago we brought home a group of American fighting men who had obeyed their country's call and who had fought as bravely and as well as any Americans in our history. They came home without a victory, not because they had been defeated but because our Government had not permitted them to win.

They were greeted by no parades, no bands, no waving of the flag they had so nobly served. There has been no "thank you" for their sacrifice. There has been no effort to honor and thus give pride to the families of more than 57,000 young men who gave their lives in that far away war. Pride, of course, cannot wipe out the burden of grief borne by those families but it can make that grief easier to bear. The pain will not be quite as sharp if they know their fellow citizens share that pain.

John Stuart Mill said: "War is an ugly thing. But not the ugliest of things. A man who has nothing which he cares about more than his personal safety is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

Back in 1970 Kenneth Y. Tomlinson wrote of what he had seen our young men do beyond the call of military duty in Vietnam. A Marine from Texas on his way in at dawn

from an all night patrol stopping to treat huge sores on the back of an old Vietnamese man. An artillery man from New Jersey spending his free time stacking sand bags at an orphanage to protect the children from mortar attacks. An Army engineer from California distributing toys he had bought in Hong Kong to the orphans his unit had adopted.

One senior military officer told Tomlinson, "My hardest task is keeping track of the incurable humanitarianism of our troops."

None of the recent movies about that war have found time to show that humanitarianism. In 1969 alone, U.S. Army volunteers helped construct 1,253 schools and 597 hospitals and dispensaries, contributing \$300,000 from their own pockets. Marines from the 3rd Amphibious force helped build 268 classrooms, 75 dispensaries, and 78 churches, temples and pagodas. Marines contributed \$40,000 to ensure an education for 935 children. Air Force men gave money and their own labor to 1,218 schools, medical facilities and orphanages. Air Force doctors, dentists and medics treated 300,000 Vietnamese in volunteer programs.

The Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital treated in that one year some 16,000 children, many of whom might have died without that hospital. One of the finest and most modern in the Far East, it was built and financed with money raised by combat Marines. An 11-year-old boy burned over three-quarters of his body was one of those saved. He interrupted

the game he was playing with visiting Marines to say: "All my life I will never forget this place and these healing people. Some way I will repay them."

A 27-year-old chaplain from Springfield, Missouri came upon an orphanage where 60 children were sleeping on the floor of a school and subsisting on a bowl of rice a day. He told some men of the Americal division's 5th Battalion, 46th Infantry about what he'd seen. A veteran sergeant said, "Don't worry Chaplain, those kids have just got themselves some new parents." And they had. Combat troops began sacking enemy food supplies they captured and shipping them back on returning helicopters. They found cots in a salvage dump, repaired them and soon the children were sleeping in beds for the first time. On pay day the cup was passed. Marines earmarked 10 percent of all poker winnings and by the end of the year the orphans were in a new building.

An Air Force pilot saw 240 lepers living in unimaginable filth. Soon there were volunteers from all branches of the military spending their weekends building houses and a hospital.

The stories go on and on. A Green Beret learned that a mother in a remote mountain village was having trouble in childbirth. He made his way to her home, carried her to a truck and raced to Camranh, where a Navy doctor delivered the baby. On Christmas he gave 1,500 orphans toothpaste, soap, candy and nuts he had collected from fellow servicemen.

Bob Hope, who visited our men as he had in two previous wars, said of them: "The number of our G.I.s who devote their free time, energy and money to aid the Vietnamese would surprise you. But maybe it wouldn't," he added. "I guess you know what kind of guys your sons and brothers and the kids next door are."

Yes we do know. I think we just let it slip our minds for a while. It is time to show our pride in them and to thank them.

I have one more story and the individual in this story is here today. Thanks to the Secretary of Defense, Cap Weinberger, I learned of this story which had been overlooked or buried for several years. It has to do with the highest award our Nation can give -- the Congressional Medal of Honor. This is given only for service "above and beyond the call of duty." I shall read this story because it is told in the Citation that has been lost, with the medal it calls for that was undelivered to the man who did perform "above and beyond the call of duty."

Secretary Weinberger, would you please escort Sergeant Benavidez forward. (Read Citation)

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They were greeted by no parades, no bands, no waving of the flag they had so nobly served. There has been no "thank you" for their sacrifice. There has been no effort to honor and thus give pride to the families of more than 5⁷0,000 young men who gave their lives in that far away war. ^{too, like} ^{wonder} Pride, of course, cannot wipe out the burden of grief borne by those families but it can make that grief easier to bear. The pain will not be quite as sharp if they know their fellow citizens share that pain.

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MEDAL OF HONOR CEREMONY: February 24, 1981

Several years ago we brought home a group of American fighting men who had obeyed their country's call and who had fought as bravely and as well as any Americans in our history. They came home without a victory, not because they had been defeated but because ~~our government~~ ^{they} had ~~not~~ ^{been} ~~denied permission~~ ^{denied permission} to win.

They were greeted by no parades, no bands, no waving of the flag they had so nobly served. There has been no "thank you" for their sacrifice. There has been no effort to honor and thus give pride to the families of more than 57,000 young men who gave their lives in that far away war.

4/ Pride, of course, cannot wipe out the burden of grief borne by ~~these~~ ^{their} families but it can make that grief easier to

bear. The pain will not be quite as sharp if they know

their fellow citizens share that pain.

no recognition of the ~~fact~~ ^{gratitude} we owe to the more than 300,000 ^{men} ~~who~~ ^{who} died in Vietnam. There has been little or no recognition of the ~~fact~~ ^{gratitude} we owe to the more than 300,000 ^{men} ~~who~~ ^{who} died in Vietnam.

John Stuart Mill said: "War is an ugly thing. But

not the ugliest of things. A man who has nothing which he cares about more than his personal safety is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

Back in 1970 Kenneth Y. Tomlinson wrote of what he had seen our young men do beyond the call of military duty in Vietnam. A Marine from Texas on his way in at dawn

from an all night patrol stopping to treat huge sores on the back of an old Vietnamese man. An artillery man from New Jersey spending his free time stacking sand bags at an orphanage to protect the children from mortar attacks. An Army engineer from California distributing toys he had bought in Hong Kong to the orphans his unit had adopted.

One senior military officer told Tomlinson, "My hardest task is keeping track of the incurable humanitarianism of our troops."

None of the recent movies about that war have found time to show that humanitarianism. In 1969 alone, U.S. Army volunteers helped construct 1,253 schools and 597 hospitals and dispensaries, contributing \$300,000 from their own pockets. Marines from the 3rd Amphibious force helped build 268 classrooms, 75 dispensaries, and 78 churches, temples and pagodas. Marines contributed \$40,000 to ensure an education for 935 children. Air Force men gave money and their own labor to 1,218 schools, medical facilities and orphanages. Air Force doctors, dentists and medics treated ^{390,000}~~300,000~~ Vietnamese in volunteer programs. +

The Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital treated in that one year some 16,000 children, many of whom might have died without that hospital. One of the finest and most modern in the Far East, it was built and financed with money raised by combat Marines. An 11-year-old boy burned over three-quarters of his body was one of those saved. He interrupted

(Dolan) KK

February 23, 1981

MEDAL OF HONOR CEREMONY
February 24, 1981

*Insert
P. 4*

In his book, the Bridges at Toko-Ri, novelist James Michener writes movingly of the heroes who fought in the Korean conflict. ~~He tells of their hardship as they served in a cold, twilight struggle that many at home only wanted to forget.~~

In the book's final scene, an admiral stands on the darkened bridge of his carrier waiting for pilots he knows will never return from their mission. *And as he waits he*

~~Finally, he breaks his vigil and, wondering at the selflessness of those forgotten fliers~~ *did* ~~asks in the silent darkness: "Where do we get such men?.. where do we get such that same question when our P.O.W.s were returned from savage captivity in Vietnam. Where did we find such men? We find them where we've always found them; in our villages & towns, on our city streets in our shops &~~

9 on page
Almost a generation later, after another twilight struggle, many Americans found themselves again asking that question. Our prisoners of war had returned to Clark Field in the Philippines and despite a hideous captivity in North Vietnam --

...the flag, thanking us for

Page three

the game he was playing with visiting Marines to say: "All my life I will never forget this place and these healing people. Some way I will repay them."

A 27-year-old chaplain from Springfield, Missouri came upon an orphanage where 60 children were sleeping on the floor of a school and subsisting on ^{two} ~~a~~ bowl of rice a day. He told some men of the Americal division's 5th Battalion, 46th Infantry about what he'd seen. A veteran sergeant said, "Don't worry Chaplain, those kids have just got themselves some new parents." And they had. ~~Combat troops~~ ^{ARMY} began sacking enemy food supplies they captured and shipping them back on returning helicopters. They found cots in a salvage dump, repaired them and soon the children were sleeping in beds for the first time. On pay day the cup was passed. Marines earmarked 10 percent of all poker winnings and by the end of the year the orphans were in a new building.

An Air Force pilot saw 240 lepers living in unimaginable filth. Soon there were volunteers from all branches of the military spending their weekends building houses and a hospital.

The stories go on and on. A Green Beret learned that a mother in a remote mountain village was having trouble in childbirth. He made his way to her home, carried her to a truck and raced to Camranh, where a Navy doctor delivered the baby. On Christmas he gave 1,500 orphans toothpaste, soap, candy and nuts he had collected from fellow servicemen.

Bob Hope, who visited our men as he had in two previous wars, said of them: "The number of our G.I.s who devote their free time, energy and money to aid the Vietnamese would surprise you. But maybe it wouldn't," he added. "I guess you know what kind of guys your sons and brothers and the kids next door are."

Yes we do know. I think we just let it slip our minds for a while. It is time to show our pride in them and to thank them.

← INSERT →

I have one more story and the individual in this story ~~was brought up on a farm outside Curo in De Witt Co. Texas. He~~ is here today. Thanks to the Secretary of Defense, Cap

Weinberger, I learned of this story which had been overlooked or buried for several years. It has to do with the highest award our Nation can give -- the Congressional Medal of Honor -- ~~It is~~ given only for service "above and beyond the call of duty." I shall read this story because it is told in the Citation that ~~has been lost, with the medal it calls for that was undelivered to the man who did perform "above and beyond the call of duty."~~

Secretary Weinberger, would you please escort Sergeant Benavidez forward. (~~Read Citation~~) ~~Benavidez~~.


Ladies & Gentlemen we are honored to have with us Master Sgt. Roy P. Benavidez U.S. Army retired.

Let me read the plain, factual military language of the citation that was lost for too long a time. ~~Where there is a brave man, it is said, there is the spirit of the fight; thus the plain of~~

Today we have honored a brave man -- and in pledging to protect the sacrifices of other such men in the future -- we have honored all those brave men who so willingly gave us themselves in a noble cause in Vietnam. Men, to whose valor we hope there will soon be a memorial here in Washington.

I know Sergeant, because of the unselfish person you are, you frequently think -- perhaps even today -- of those men you were not able to bring out during those hours of fire and death near Loc Ninh.

And so I will conclude by asking you to join me in a moment of silent prayer for those men, for all those who fought in Vietnam and never returned.

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Almost a generation later, after another twilight struggle, many Americans found themselves again asking that question. Our prisoners of war had returned to Clark Field in the Philippines and despite a hideous captivity in North Vietnam -- down the ramp they came -- saluting the flag, thanking us for bringing them home and then saying, proudly, "God Bless America."

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Where do we get such men? The answer comes as quickly as we ask the question. We find them where we have always found them: in our villages and towns, on our city streets, in our shops, on our farms.

Today we are in the presence of one such American brought up on a farm just outside of Curo in DeWitt County Texas -- a man of selflessness, of gallantry, of valor.

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Where there is a brave man, it is said, there is the thickest of the fight: there the place of honor.

Yours was -- and is -- a place of honor, Sergeant. Those men -- and their families whose lives you saved that day near Loc Ninh are grateful to you -- as today our entire nation is grateful to you. We applaud you, as you take your place in this hall of heroes.

But I want you to know our gratitude goes beyond words -- beyond even this highest of all military decorations.

We are a people of peace, we must always remain so. We will never fail to go a last full mile to protect that peace. For us, military force is always a last resort -- we will never fight unless we must.

But let the world understand what the United States has learned in Korea and Vietnam. If ever again we must ask our young men to fight and die for their country, we vow that our leaders will stand behind them until our victory is decisive and complete. There will be no prolonged indecision, no protracted conflict, no privileged sanct^Cuary. The United States will always do its utmost to avoid conflict, but if our hand is ever forced again, let it be understood: for America, there will be no substitute for victory.

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~~Isabel B. St~~

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM

19 FEBRUARY 1981

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

TO: KEN KHACHIGIAN

VIA: GREGORY J. NEWELL

FROM: MICHAEL P. CASTINE *mpc*

SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH REQUIREMENT.

DATE: 24 FEB 1981

TIME: 1:30

EVENT: Medal of Honor Ceremony

REQUEST: Brief Remarks

LENGTH OF SPEECH: 5 minutes

DURATION OF EVENT: 1 hour

PROJECT OFFICER: Joe Canzeri

ATTENDING CEREMONY:
BACKGROUND: Master Sargeant Roy Benavidez (recipient)
Mrs. Hilaria Benavidez (wife)
Miss Denise Benavidez (daughter)
Miss Yvette Benavidez (daughter)
Master Noel Benavidez (son)

Sec. of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger
Deputy Sec. of Defense Frank Carlucci
Sec. of Army John O. Marsh
General David Jones, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
General Edward C. Meyer, Chief of Staff of the Army
Sargeant Major of the Army William A. Connelly

Mrs. Reagan

NOTE

Preceding the Ceremony at the Pentagon the President and First Lady, and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, will greet the recipient and his family in the Oval Office. Talking Points may be needed for this brief meeting.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

NAME: Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, United States Army, Retired.

ORGANIZATION AT THE TIME OF ACT: Detachment B-56 (SIGMA), 5th Special Forces Group, Republic of Vietnam.

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: August 5, 1935, on a small farm outside Cureo in DeWitt County, Texas.

WIFE: Hilaria (Lala) Coy Benavidez, El Campo, Texas (place of birth Sinton, Texas).

CHILDREN: Denise Benavidez (daughter, age 14, a freshman at El Campo, Texas High School).

Yvette Benavidez (daughter, age 11, who attends St. Phillip's Catholic School in El Campo, Texas).

Noel Benavidez (son, age 8, who attends St. Phillip's Catholic School in El Campo, Texas).

CIVILIAN SCHOOLING: Following retirement from the Army, attended Wharton County (Texas) Junior College for two years.

MILITARY SCHOOLING: Basic Airborne Training; Third U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Academy; Advanced Chemical Noncommissioned Officer Course; Operations and Intelligence Course and Light/Heavy Weapons School (with cross training as a medic), U.S. Army Special Forces School.

SUMMARY OF SERVICE: Enlisted into the U.S. Army Reserve in June 1952, and served in that capacity until June 1955. Entered active duty June 1955, and served continuously until September 1976, when he was medically retired as a result of combat-related injuries. Served in a variety of infantry, military police and Special Forces assignments, as a chauffeur for senior Army officers, and as an enlisted advisor to the Army's Special Forces reserve units. Overseas service includes two tours in the Republic of Vietnam and assignments in Korea and the Federal Republic of Germany. Participated in six campaigns in the Republic of Vietnam.

MAJOR PERMANENT DUTY ASSIGNMENTS: (Last 10 years of active duty)

<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION AND DUTIES</u>
MAY 66	JUL 66	Chemical Noncommissioned Officer, 1st Battalion, 325th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division, Ft. Bragg, N.C.
JUL 66	FEB 67	Personnel Management Noncommissioned Officer, 82d Airborne Division, Ft. Bragg, N.C.
FEB 67	APR 68	Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, U.S. Army Special Forces Training Group, Ft. Bragg, N.C.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, cont'd

<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION AND DUTIES</u>
APR 68	MAY 68	Light Weapons Infantry Leader, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam.
MAY 68	MAY 69	Patient, Brooke Army Medical Center, Ft. Sam Houston, TX.
MAY 69	AUG 69	Light Weapons Infantry Leader, 10th Special Forces Group, Ft. Devens, MA.
AUG 69	SEP 71	Chauffeur for Commanding General, 24th and later 1st Infantry Divisions, Ft. Riley, KS.
SEP 71	JUN 72	Operations Sergeant, 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Ft. Riley, KS.
JUN 72	JUL 73	Chauffeur to Commanding General, Fifth U.S. Army, Ft. Sam Houston, TX.
JUL 73	SEP 76	Senior Enlisted Advisor, U.S. Army Readiness Region VII, Ft. Sam Houston, TX.

Medically retired September 10, 1976

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PROMOTIONS

<u>Promotion</u>	<u>Date of Rank</u>
Private (E2)	November 5, 1955
Private First Class	June 10, 1958
Specialist Four	February 15, 1959
Specialist Five	May 11, 1964
Staff Sergeant	September 8, 1964
Sergeant First Class	June 20, 1968
Master Sergeant	June 26, 1975

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Medal of Honor
 Meritorious Service Medal
 Army Commendation Medal
 Purple Heart with two oak leaf clusters
 Good Conduct Medal (six awards)
 Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
 Vietnam Service Medal with six service stars
 Meritorious Unit Commendation (U.S. unit award)
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
 Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Unit Citation Medal, First Class
 Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm
 Combat Infantryman Badge
 Parachute Badge
 Republic of Vietnam Parachute Badge

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, cont'd

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES SINCE RETIREMENT:

Since his medical retirement (at 80% disability), Master Sergeant Benavidez has resided with his family in El Campo, Texas. He belongs to St. Roberts Catholic Church and is active with a number of military and veterans groups including:

- o The Special Forces Decade Association
- o The 82d Airborne Division Association (Lone Star Chapter)
- o The Disabled American Veterans (lifetime member)
- o The American Legion (past 2nd Vice Commander at the El Campo Post 251)
- o The Veterans of Foreign Wars
- o The Legion of Valor
- o The El Campo Action Community Committee (an advisory body to the mayor of El Campo)

Master Sergeant Benavidez is also the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the El Campo Chamber of Commerce and has been active in supporting Army recruiting in his community through appearances and speeches.

THE STORY OF MASTER SERGEANT ROY P. BENAVIDEZ' MEDAL OF HONOR

Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez (U.S. Army, Retired) served on continuous active duty from June 1955 until he was medically retired at 80% disability in September 1976. In addition to assignments in the United States, Germany and Korea, he served two tours in the Republic of Vietnam and was wounded three times during these assignments.

On May 2, 1968, Sergeant Benavidez (then a Staff Sergeant) volunteered to assist in extracting a stranded and beleaguered U.S. Army Special Forces Reconnaissance team located in a dense jungle west of Loc Ninh, Vietnam. This mission was extremely hazardous and many of the soldiers participating in the rescue attempt (as well as members of the stranded team) were either killed or badly wounded during the ensuing battle.

In recognition of Sergeant Benavidez' extremely valorous actions, he was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross (the Army's second highest decoration) by his Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph R. Drake. Sergeant Benavidez was awarded this decoration on May 24, 1968 by Headquarters, U.S. Army, Vietnam.

In April 1974, Colonel Drake submitted a new recommendation on Sergeant Benavidez, this time for the Medal of Honor. At that time, Colonel Drake indicated that he had not been fully aware of the voluntary and sustained nature of Sergeant Benavidez actions when he originally recommended him for the Distinguished Service Cross.

This recommendation could not be processed because the time limitations prescribed in Section 3744, Title 10, United States Code for award of military decorations had been exceeded. However, Public Law 93-469 (enacted in October 1974) extended the time limitations for processing military decorations for actions performed in Southeast Asia, and in May 1975, Colonel Drake resubmitted his recommendation that Sergeant Benavidez be awarded the Medal of Honor.

In March 1976, after careful review of the recommendation and all allied documents, the Joint Chiefs of Staff disapproved award of the Medal of Honor but sustained the award of the Distinguished Service Cross. The basis for the disapproval was that there was insufficient evidence to support award of the Medal of Honor which requires incontestable proof that the deed performed involved personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades. The nature of the action and the lapse of time since the date it took place had made it extremely difficult to find eye-witnesses to Sergeant Benavidez' heroism. A further complicating factor was that the original recommendation for the Distinguished Service Cross could not be located.

Subsequent to the decision in March 1976 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, new and critical information became available which, when considered with all other available data, justified award of the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Benavidez. Particularly critical were new eye-witness statements from

individuals who previously could not be located.

As a result of the new information, the Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously recommended that Sergeant Benavidez be awarded the Medal of Honor. This decision thus cleared the way for Sergeant Benavidez to become the 155th Vietnam era member of the U.S. Army to be awarded the nation's highest award for valor on the battlefield.



FACTS ABOUT THE ARMY MEDAL OF HONOR

The first act of Congress authorizing "medals of honor" for Army personnel was approved by President Lincoln on 12 July 1862. The Medal of Honor is presented to its recipients "in the name of the Congress of the United States." For this reason it is oftentimes referred to as the Congressional Medal of Honor. Each of the three services, Army, Navy and Air Force has its own Medal of Honor.

General George Washington had created the Badge of Military Merit at Newburgh, New York, 7 August 1782 but it had fallen into disuse after the Revolutionary War. Decorations, as such, were still too closely related to European royalty to be of concern to the American people.

However, the fierce fighting and deeds of valor of the Civil War performed so close to home, brought into focus the realization that such valor must be recognized. Legislation was introduced in the Senate 17 February 1862, which followed the pattern of a similar award approved for Naval personnel in December 1861. The Resolution provided that

"The President of the United States be, and he is hereby authorized to cause two thousand 'medals of honor' to be prepared with suitable emblematic devices, and to direct that the same be presented, in the name of Congress, to such noncommissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldier-like qualities during the present insurrection, and that the sum of ten thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby appropriated out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated for the purpose of carrying this resolution into effect."

This law was amended by the Act of 3 March 1863 to extend its provisions to include officers.

Misuse of the medal led to a change in design and more specific regulations governing its award. The first change in design was made in the ribbon in 1896 upon recommendation of The Adjutant General, because the original had been imitated by nonmilitary organizations.

In 1904 the many ambiguities of law regarding the award of the medal resulted in a second change, this time including a completely new design of the medal itself. The medal was worn either suspended from the neck or pinned over the left breast in precedence to other military decorations. Stronger laws to protect the medal were also enacted.

The present type of neck ribbon was adopted in 1944. It is worn outside the shirt collar and inside the coat, hanging above all other decorations. Except for the Legion of Merit, Degree of Commander, awarded only to foreigners, the Medal of Honor is the only United States neck decoration.

Many awards for service during the Civil War were made based only upon application of the recipient. On 3 June 1916 the Congress directed the Secretary of War to appoint a board of five retired general officers for the purpose of "investigating and reporting upon past awards of issue of the so-called Congressional Medal of Honor . . . and in any case in which said board shall find and report that said medal was issued for any cause other than distinguished conduct involving actual conflict with any enemy, the name of the recipient of the medal so issued shall be stricken permanently from the official Medal of Honor list . . . "

The board concluded its review on 15 February 1917 and had stricken 911 names. Of the 911 cases approximately 864 involved awards to members of the 27th Maine Infantry. Volunteers from that regiment had been requested to remain in service beyond the expiration of their enlistment for "mopping up" operations. It was intended to award Medals of Honor to those who responded but by some misadventure medals were awarded to the entire regiment. Other cancelled awards included those to the honor guard which accompanied the body of President Lincoln to Washington to Springfield, to "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and to Dr. Mary Walker, the only woman awarded the Medal of Honor. (Mary Walker's medal was reinstated by the Army in 1977.)

World War I brought additional recognition of the need for clarification of the criteria for the Medal of Honor. The Act of 9 July 1918 laid down the criteria which are in effect today. That Act provided that "The President may award, and present in the name of Congress, a Medal of Honor to a person who, while a member of the Army and in action involving actual conflict with an enemy, distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty."

Since the Medal of Honor has been in existence, the Army has awarded over 2200 as follows:

Civil War	1199
Indian Campaigns	419
War with Spain	30
Philippine Insurrection	70
Boxer Rebellion	4
Mexician Campaign	1
World War I	91
World War II	256
Korean Conflict	78
Vietnam Conflict	154

Also 9 Medals of Honor were awarded by special Acts of Congress. These were awarded to Major General Adolphus W. Greeley and to the Unknown Soldiers of World War I, World War II, and Korea and those of Belgium, Great Britain, France, Italy and Romania after World War I.

The Medal of Honor Roll, established by an Act of Congress, 27 April 1916, provided that upon attaining age 65 each recipient of the Medal of Honor who was honorably discharged from the service by muster-out, resignation, or otherwise, would have his name entered on the Roll and be eligible for a special pension of \$10 per month for life. The Act was amended 14 August 1961 to increase the amount of pension to \$100 per month,

decrease the age to 50 and remove the requirement of separation from the service. It was further amended 13 October 1964 to decrease the age to 40. On 31 October 1965 the Act was further amended by deleting the age of the awardee as a requirement for the special pension of \$100 a month. On 18 October 1978 the Act was further amended to increase the amount of the pension to \$200 effective 1 January 1979.

The Rolls are maintained by the respective services and payment of the pension is made by the Veterans Administration.

Living recipients of the Medal of Honor are provided free transportation on military aircraft within the continental United States on a "space available" basis. They are furnished an identification card for this purpose.

Sons of Medal of Honor holders who are otherwise qualified may be admitted to the United States Military Academy without regard to quota requirements.

Enlisted recipients of the Medal of Honor who retire after 20 years service are eligible for an increase of 10% in their retired pay, subject to the 75% limit on total retired pay.

Due to the continuing interest in the awardees of the Medal of Honor it is essential that the awardees keep the Department of the Army advised of their status and whereabouts.

During World War II the Secretary of War directed that when an individual was recommended for a Medal of Honor he be assigned where he could be quickly available for the presentation ceremony. That directive, however, did not remove a commander's responsibility and prerogative to assign men where they were needed most. It is a natural custom, nevertheless, to give every consideration in all phases of personnel actions to one who has been accorded the Nation's highest decoration.

The history of the Medal of Honor, together with citations of recipients is contained in the committee print "Medal of Honor 1863 - 1978" prepared for the US Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of the Congress the Medal of Honor to

**MASTER SERGEANT ROY P. BENAVIDEZ
UNITED STATES ARMY, RETIRED**

for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

On May 2, 1968, Master Sergeant (then Staff Sergeant) Roy P. Benavidez distinguished himself by a series of daring and extremely valorous actions while assigned to Detachment B-56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of May 2, 1968, a 12-man Special Forces Reconnaissance Team was inserted by helicopters in a dense jungle area west of Loc Ninh, Vietnam to gather intelligence information about confirmed large-scale enemy activity. This area was controlled and routinely patrolled by the North Vietnamese Army. After a short period of time on the ground, the team met heavy enemy resistance, and requested emergency extraction. Three helicopters attempted extraction, but were unable to land due to intense enemy small arms and anti-aircraft fire. Sergeant Benavidez was at the Forward Operating Base in Loc Ninh monitoring the operation by radio when these helicopters returned to off-load wounded crewmembers and to assess aircraft damage. Sergeant Benavidez voluntarily boarded a returning aircraft to assist in another extraction attempt. Realizing that all the team members were either dead or wounded and unable to move to the pickup zone, he directed the aircraft to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter, and ran approximately 75 meters under withering small arms fire to the crippled team. Prior to reaching the team's position, he was wounded in his right leg, face, and head. Despite these painful injuries, he took charge, repositioning the team members and directing their fire to facilitate the landing of an extraction aircraft, and the loading of wounded and dead team members. He then threw smoke cannisters to direct the aircraft to the team's position. Despite his severe wounds and under intense enemy fire, he carried and dragged half of the wounded team members to the awaiting aircraft. He then provided protective fire by running alongside the aircraft as it moved to pick up the remaining team members. As the enemy's fire intensified, he hurried to recover the body and the classified documents on the dead team leader. When he reached the team leader's body, Sergeant Benavidez was severely wounded by small arms fire in the abdomen and grenade fragments in his back. At nearly the same moment, the aircraft pilot was mortally wounded, and his helicopter crashed. Although in extremely critical condition due to his multiple wounds, Sergeant Benavidez secured the classified documents and made his way back to the wreckage, where he aided the wounded out of the overturned aircraft, and gathered the stunned survivors into a defensive perimeter. Under increasing enemy automatic weapons and grenade fire, he moved around the perimeter distributing water and ammunition to his weary men, reinstilling in them a will to live and fight. Facing a build-up of enemy opposition with a beleaguered team, Sergeant Benavidez mustered his strength, and began calling in tactical air strikes and directing the fire from supporting gunships, to suppress the enemy's fire and so permit another extraction attempt. He was wounded again in his thigh by small arms fire while administering first aid to a wounded team member just before another extraction helicopter was able to land. His indomitable spirit kept him going as he began to ferry his comrades to the craft. On his second trip with the wounded, he was clubbed from behind by an enemy soldier. In the ensuing hand-to-hand combat, he sustained additional wounds to his head and arms before killing his adversary. He then continued under devastating fire to carry the wounded to the helicopter. Upon reaching the aircraft, he spotted and killed two enemy soldiers who were rushing the craft from an angle that prevented the aircraft door gunner from firing upon them. With little strength remaining, he made one last trip to the perimeter to ensure that all classified material had been collected or destroyed, and to bring in the remaining wounded. Only then, in extremely serious condition from numerous wounds and loss of blood, did he allow himself to be pulled into the extraction aircraft. Sergeant Benavidez' gallant choice to join voluntarily his comrades who were in critical straits, to expose himself constantly to withering enemy fire, and his refusal to be stopped despite numerous severe wounds, saved the lives of at least eight men. His fearless personal leadership, tenacious devotion to duty, and extremely valorous actions in the face of overwhelming odds were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army.