

# Medal of Honor

## Spc. 5 Dennis M. Fujii

Adapted from a Department of Defense News article by Katie Lange

**S**pc. 5 Dennis M. Fujii received the Nation's highest honor for valor from President Joseph R. Biden during a 5 July 2022 White House ceremony for his actions following a failed medical evacuation on 18–20 February 1971.

Fujii was serving as the crew chief aboard a medevac helicopter that was sent to evacuate seriously wounded South Vietnamese soldiers from a raging battle in Laos against North Vietnamese troops who had been using what was known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail to infiltrate into South Vietnam. Under heavy fire at the landing zone, Fujii's helicopter was hit by a mortar round as it attempted to take off, causing it to crash. Fujii ran with other survivors to a nearby bunker but was hit by mortar shrapnel in his shoulder.

He was hit again by shrapnel forty-five minutes later, this time in the eye, when attempting to reach a second aircraft. Drawing intense enemy fire and knowing he could not reach the aircraft, he waved the helicopter off. The only remaining American, Fujii radioed other U.S. aircraft to call off all subsequent evacuation attempts due to the intensity of the enemy fire. For the next two days, he administered aid to wounded South Vietnamese troops while ignoring his own injuries.

In the evening of the nineteenth, a reinforced enemy regiment supported by artillery fire assaulted the unit. Although he had never directed air strikes before, he was the only English speaker on the ground, so he had to learn

fast. He continued to direct fires for seventeen hours, often from exposed positions and during intense fighting. Fujii was finally evacuated on 20 February, but that aircraft was also shot and had to crash land at another South Vietnamese encampment. He was finally evacuated to safety on 22 February. Originally awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions, along with two Purple Hearts, Fujii's award was upgraded after a military review of awards made to minorities. To read the complete Department of Defense article on Fujii's exploits, visit <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3122476/medal-of-honor-monday-army-spc-5-dennis-m-fujii/>. ■



President Joseph R. Biden awards the Medal of Honor to former Army Spc. 5 Dennis M. Fujii for his actions on 18–20 February 1971 during the Vietnam War, at a ceremony in the White House, 5 July 2022. (Photo by Sgt. Henry Villarama, U.S. Army)



Army Spc. 5 Dennis Fujii returns home to Hawaii from Vietnam in 1971 with a hero's welcome. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)