T WENTY-FOUR VETERANS from three wars were awarded the nation’s highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor, during a ceremony at the White House on 18 March 2014.

Three Vietnam veterans—Master Sgt. Jose Rodela, Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris, and Sgt. Santiago J. Erevia—received their awards from President Barack Obama. Posthumous awards were presented to the families of the other 21 recipients.

The medals were an upgrade of previously awarded Distinguished Service Crosses for various acts of uncommon bravery during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The upgrades resulted from a congressionally mandated review of awards to ensure heroism of veterans was not overlooked due to prejudice or discrimination. The recipients were of Hispanic, Jewish, and African-American descent.

President Obama said during his remarks, “For their gallantry under fire each of these soldiers was long ago recognized with the Army’s second-highest award—the Distinguished Service Cross. But ask their fellow veterans, ask their families, and they’ll tell you that their extraordinary deeds merited the highest recognition. And today, we have the chance to set the record straight.”

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel inducted the soldiers into the Pentagon Hall of Heroes the next day. Secretary Hagel said the 24 soldiers’ “acts of gallantry in battle merit our highest recognition.”

WORLD WAR II

-Pvt. Pedro Cano
-Pvt. Joe Gandara
-Staff Sgt. Salvador J. Lara
-Staff Sgt. William F. Leonard
-Master Sgt. Manuel V. Mendoza