



Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins

MEDAL OF HONOR

VIETNAM WAR



Two Vietnam War veterans, retired Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins and Spc. 4 Donald P. Sloat, were each awarded the Medal of Honor in a ceremony at the White House, 15 September 2014. Adkins received the medal in person from President Barack Obama. Sloat's award was posthumous; his brother, Dr. Bill Sloat, received the medal on his behalf.

Adkins was presented the medal for numerous acts of valor during a 38-hour battle at Camp A Shau, Republic of Vietnam, and 48 hours of escape and evasion, 9-12 March 1966. He is credited with killing more than 135 enemy soldiers during the battle while suffering 18 wounds.

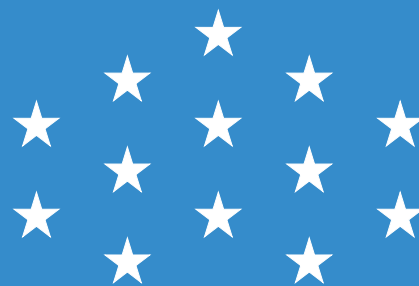
When a large North Vietnamese force attacked the Camp A Shau on 9 March, Adkins manned a mortar position. He mounted a defense of the camp, sustaining wounds from several direct hits by enemy mortar rounds in the process. He left the mortar position temporarily, facing mortar and sniper fire to drag several wounded comrades to safety. Adkins repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to evacuate wounded casualties and retrieve supplies.

On the morning of 10 March, the enemy launched their main assault. Adkins continued to man the mortar until he had exhausted all rounds, then fought off waves of enemy soldiers with rifle fire. Withdrawing to a communications bunker with a small element of soldiers, he continued to fight off the enemy, receiving more wounds in the process. Adkins and the group destroyed the signal equipment and classified documents, then fought their way out of the camp. Because he was carrying a wounded soldier, Adkins and his group could not reach the last evacuation helicopter. Instead, he led them into the jungle and evaded the enemy for 48 hours until they were rescued by a helicopter on 12 March.

Spc. 4 Donald P. Sloat

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Adkins, a native of Opelika, Ala., deployed to Vietnam for three nonconsecutive tours as a member of the U.S. Army Special Forces.

Sloat received the award for sacrificing his life to save those of his fellow squad members while on patrol in Que Son Valley, Republic of Vietnam, 17 January 1970.

When the lead soldier in the patrol hit a trip wire attached to a hand-grenade booby trap, the grenade rolled downhill to Sloat. Knowing that detonation was imminent and he could not throw the grenade in any direction without harming his fellow soldiers, he chose to pull the grenade into his body, absorbing the blast to shield the others, and ultimately, saving their lives.

Sloat was a native of Coweta, Okla. He was twenty years old when he died.

President Obama said during the ceremony, “Over the decades, our Vietnam veterans didn’t always receive the thanks and respect they deserved. That’s a fact. But as we have been reminded again today, our Vietnam vets were patriots and are patriots. You served with valor. You made us proud. And your service is with us for eternity. So no matter how long it takes, no matter how many years go by, we will continue to express our gratitude for your extraordinary service.”

During his remarks, President Obama mentioned the delinquency of the awards, presented over four decades after the events took place. He said, “Normally, this medal must be awarded within a few years of the action. But sometimes even the most extraordinary stories can get lost in the fog of war or the passage of time. Yet when new evidence comes to light, certain actions can be reconsidered for this honor, and it is entirely right and proper that we have done so.”

Adkins and Sloat were inducted into the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes on 16 September.



(Photos courtesy of U.S. Army)