



Medal of Honor

Maj. John J. Duffy

Maj. John J. Duffy was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on 14–15 April 1992 in the Central Highlands of the Republic of Vietnam while assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group and serving as a senior advisor to the 11th Airborne Battalion, 2nd Brigade, Airborne Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

On 14 April, Duffy was directing the defense of Fire Support Base Charlie, which was surrounded by a battalion-sized enemy element. The ARVN battalion commander had been killed and Duffy wounded twice during an attack two days before, but Duffy had refused medical evacuation. That morning, he was wounded again as he moved toward enemy anti-aircraft positions to direct airstrikes, but again he refused evacuation. Instead, as the enemy began pounding the base with artillery, Duffy remained in an exposed position to direct gunship fire on the enemy positions, which temporarily stopped the barrage. During the lull, he supervised moving the wounded to a safe location and redistributed ammunition. However, enemy artillery fire resumed, and Duffy once again

moved to an exposed position to direct gunship fire. Later that evening, as the enemy assaulted the fire base from all sides, Duffy moved from position to position to spot targets and adjust fire, and ultimately, to direct gunship fire on a friendly position that had been compromised. That evening, when it was clear that the base would be overrun, he organized a withdrawal. Duffy continued to call for fire on the enemy and was the last man out of the base.

The next morning, the remaining soldiers were ambushed as they move toward an extraction site. Duffy organized the men into a hasty defense to push the enemy back and then led them to the landing zone. He continued to direct gunship fire against the pursuing enemy, marked the LZ, and supervised the extraction. Duffy saved a South Vietnamese paratrooper who had fallen from the aircraft as he boarded; he was the last man onboard.

Duffy originally receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions, but it was upgraded fifty years later. He received sixty-three other awards for his time in service, including eight Purple Hearts.

Missing-in-Action Requiem

They were missing-in-action.
Their bodies were not recovered.
Their stories are not known.
Their deeds went unrecorded.

They went off on a war mission.
They were tasked to do reconnaissance.
They were tasked to bomb the enemy.
They patrolled in submarines.

No reports, no stories: missing-in-action.
Had they lived, they would speak:
“We fought the devils without knives.
We killed them until they killed us.”

“I aimed my bombs and they hit,
My plane exploded, hit by a missile.”
“We sank three enemy ships and were escaping,
They depth-charged us, we are at the bottom.”

Play the Pipes, and beat the drum slowly.
Dip the flag in honor of a fallen hero.
Let a tear run down your face in homage.
Salute a brave warrior. Missing-In-Action.

—Maj. John J. Duffy

Maj. (Ret.) John J. Duffy, a Medal of Honor awardee, is an accomplished and widely recognized poet, who has written extensive verse examining his experiences in combat as well as a wide variety of other subjects. He has written six books of poetry and has been previously nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Two of his poems were selected to be inscribed on monuments. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)

