



Posthumous Medal of Honor Nominees Exemplified Heroism in Three Wars

Compiled by Michael L. Lewis

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President Barack Obama announced Feb. 21 that he will award the Medal of Honor to 24 veterans during a March 18 ceremony at the White House. The award, the highest for valor, is an upgrade from the Distinguished Service Cross that the Soldiers received for their intrepid actions, personal bravery and devotion to duty during actions against enemy forces.

Of the awards, all but one will go to enlisted Soldiers, including to 17 NCOs. Seven awards will go to Soldiers who fought in World War II, nine to those who fought in the Korean War, and eight to those who fought in the Vietnam War. With the exception of three living Vietnam veterans (see separate stories above), all awards will be posthumous:

Vietnam War

Spc. 4 Leonard L. Alvarado



- **Born:** Feb. 13, 1947, in Bakersfield, Calif.
- **Killed in Action:** Aug. 12, 1969, in Phuoc Long province, Vietnam, at age 22
- **Unit:** D Company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division

As Alvarado and his small reaction force moved through dense jungle to relieve a trapped sister platoon, he and his comrades were pinned down by a hostile force. Alvarado was quickly moving forward through the enemy machine-gun fire in order to engage the enemy troops when, suddenly, an enemy grenade exploded nearby, wounding and momentarily stunning him. Retaliating immediately, he killed the grenadier just as another enemy barrage wounded him again. He crawled forward through the fusillade to pull several comrades back within the hastily formed perimeter. Realizing that his element must break away from the hostile force, he began maneuvering forward alone. Though repeatedly thrown to the ground by exploding satchel charges, he continued advancing and firing, silencing several emplacements. From his dangerous forward position, he persistently laid suppressive fire on the hostile forces, and after the enemy troops had broken contact, his comrades discovered that he had succumbed to his wounds.

Staff Sgt. Felix M. Conde-Falcon



- **Born:** Feb. 24, 1938, in Juncos, Puerto Rico
- **Killed in Action:** April 4, 1969, near Ap Tan Hoa, Vietnam, at age 31
- **Unit:** D Company, 1st Battalion, 505th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division

Conde-Falcon was serving as a platoon leader during a sweep operation in a heavily wooded section on the route of advance when the company encountered an extensive enemy bunker complex, later identified as a battalion command post. Following tactical artillery and air strikes on the heavily secured position, Conde-Falcon's platoon was selected to assault and clear the bunker fortifications. Moving out ahead of his platoon, he charged the first bunker, heaving grenades as he went. As the hostile fire increased, he crawled to the blind side of an entrenchment position, jumped to the roof, and tossed a lethal grenade into the bunker aperture. Without hesitating, he proceeded to two additional bunkers, which he destroyed in the same manner. Rejoining his platoon, he selected three men to accompany him to maneuver toward the enemy's flank position. With only a machine gun, he single-handedly assaulted the nearest fortification, killing the enemy inside before running out of ammunition. After returning to the three men with his empty weapon and taking up an M-16 rifle, he concentrated on the next bunker. But within 10 meters of his goal, he was shot by an unseen assailant and soon died of his wounds.

Sgt. Ardie R. Copas



In the early morning, Copas' company was suddenly attacked by a large hostile force firing recoilless rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. After Copas began returning fire, his armored car was struck by an enemy recoilless round, knocking him to the ground and injuring four American Soldiers beside the vehicle. Ignoring his own wounds, Copas quickly remounted the burning vehicle and commenced firing his machine gun at the belligerents. Braving the hostile fire directed at him and the possible detonation of mortar rounds inside his vehicle, Copas maintained a heavy volume of suppressive fire on the foes while the wounded Americans were safely evacuated. Undaunted, he continued to place devastating volleys of fire upon his adversaries until he was mortally wounded when another enemy round hit his vehicle.

- **Born:** Aug. 29, 1950, in Fort Pierce, Fla.
- **Killed in Action:** May 12, 1970, near Ph Romeas Hek, Cambodia, at age 19
- **Unit:** C Company, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division

Sgt. Jesus S. Duran



Duran's reconnaissance platoon was moving into an elaborate enemy bunker complex when the lead elements began taking concentrated ambush fire from every side. With an M-60 machine gun blazing from his hip, Duran, then a specialist four, rushed forward and assumed a defensive position near the command post. As hostile forces stormed the post, he stood tall in a cloud of dust that was being raised by the impacting rounds and bursting grenades aimed at him. Yet he was able to thwart the chargers with devastating streams of machine-gun fire. Learning that two seriously wounded Soldiers lay helplessly pinned down under harassing fire, he assaulted the enemy positions, firing deadly bursts on the run. Mounting a log, he fired directly into the enemy's fox-holes, eliminating four of them inside and several others as they fled. He then continued to pour effective fire on the disorganized and fleeing enemy.

- **Born:** July 26, 1948, in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico
- **Died:** Feb. 17, 1977, in Riverside, Calif., at age 28
- **Date of action:** April 10, 1969, in Vietnam
- **Unit:** E Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division

Sgt. Candelario Garcia



- **Born:** Feb. 26, 1944, in Corsicana, Texas
- **Died:** Jan. 10, 2013, in Corsicana at age 68
- **Date of action:** Dec. 8, 1968, near Lai Khe, Vietnam
- **Unit:** B Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division

Garcia was serving as a team leader when his platoon discovered communication wire and other signs of an enemy base camp within a densely vegetated area. As the unit advanced, they came under intense fire, and several men became wounded and trapped in the open. Ignoring a hail of hostile bullets, Garcia crawled to within 10 meters of a machine-gun bunker, leapt to his feet and ran directly at the fortification, firing his rifle as he charged. Once he reached the bunker, he jammed two hand grenades into its gun port and then placed the muzzle of his weapons inside, killing all four occupants. Continuing to expose himself to intense enemy fire, Garcia raced 15 meters to another bunker and killed its three defenders with hand grenades and rifle fire. After again braving the enemy barrage to rescue two casualties, he joined his company in an assault that overran the remaining enemy positions.

Korean War

Cpl. Joe R. Baldonado



- **Born:** Aug. 28, 1930, in Colorado
- **Killed in Action:** Nov. 25, 1950, near Kang-deng, Korea, at age 20
- **Unit:** B Company, 1st Battalion, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, 11th Airborne Division

Around 4 a.m., Baldonado's platoon was occupying positions on Hill 171 when the enemy launched a strong attack in an effort to seize the hill. By 6 a.m., the platoon had expended most of its ammunition in repelling the enemy attack, and the platoon leader decided to commit his third squad, with its supply of ammunition, to the defensive action. Since there was no time to dig in because of the proximity of the enemy, who had advanced to within 25 yards of the platoon's positions, Baldonado, a machine-gunner of the third squad, placed his weapon in an exposed position and delivered a withering stream of fire on the advancing enemy, causing them to fall back in disorder. The enemy then concentrated all their fire on Baldonado's gun, and attempted to knock it out by rushing the position in small groups, hurling grenades. Several times, grenades exploded extremely close to Baldonado, but failed to interrupt his continuous firing. The hostile troops made repeated attempts to storm his position and were driven back each time with appalling casualties. The enemy finally withdrew at 7 a.m., after making a final assault on Baldonado's position, during which a grenade landed near his gun, killing him instantly. His remains have not yet been found.

Sgt. Victor H. Espinoza



While spearheading an attack to secure “Old Baldy,” Hill 266, Espinoza’s unit was pinned down by withering artillery, mortar and small-arms fire from strongly fortified positions. Fully aware of the odds against him, Espinoza, then a corporal, stormed forward in a daring assault and, firing his rifle and throwing grenades, silenced a machine gun and its crew. Continuing up the fire-swept slope, he neutralized a mortar, wiped out two bunkers and killed its defenders. After expending his ammunition, he employed enemy grenades, hurling them into the hostile trenches and inflicting additional casualties. Observing a tunnel on the crest of the hill that could not be destroyed by grenades, he obtained explosives, entered the tunnel, set the charge and destroyed the tunnel and the troops it sheltered, allowing his unit to secure the strong point.

- **Born:** July 15, 1929, in El Paso, Texas
- **Died:** April 17, 1986, in El Paso at age 56
- **Date of action:** Aug. 1, 1952, at Chorwon, Korea
- **Unit:** A Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division

Sgt. 1st Class Eduardo Corral Gomez



While readying defensive positions, Gomez’s company was ruthlessly attacked in the early morning hours by a hostile force spearheaded by two T-34 tanks. Though the first tank moved to within 75 yards of the command post before it was immobilized by rocket fire, its main battery and machine guns continued to rake the company perimeter with devastating fire. Realizing the tank posed a serious threat to the entire company, Gomez, then a sergeant, voluntarily crawled 30 yards across an open rice field, boarded the tank, and, prying open one of the hatches on the turret, dropped a grenade into the hull, killing the crew. Wounded in the left side while returning to his position, he refused to be evacuated. Observing that the tripod of a .30-caliber machine gun was rendered inoperable by enemy fire, he cradled the weapon in his arms, returned to the forward defensive positions, and swept the assaulting force with withering fire. Although his weapon overheated and burned his hands, and his painful wound still bled, he maintained his stand and, upon orders to withdraw in the face of overwhelming enemy superiority, remained to provide protective fire. Gomez refused to leave his post for medical attention until the company had established a new defensive position.

- **Born:** Oct. 28, 1919, in Los Angeles
- **Died:** Information not available
- **Date of action:** Sept. 3, 1950, at Tabu-dong, Korea
- **Unit:** I Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division

Pfc. Leonard M. Kravitz



- **Born:** Aug. 8, 1930, in Brooklyn, N.Y.
- **Killed in Action:** March 7, 1951, at Yangpyong, Korea, at age 20
- **Unit:** M Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Regimental

Combat Team, attached to the 24th Infantry Division

Kravitz, an assistant machine-gunner, was in a defensive position on strategic key terrain when the enemy launched a fanatical banzai charge with heavy supporting fire and, despite staggering losses, pressed the assault with ruthless determination. When the machine-gunner was wounded in the initial phase of action, Kravitz immediately seized the weapon and poured devastating fire into the ranks of onrushing assailants. When the enemy effected and exploited a breach on the left flank, Kravitz was ordered to withdraw, but he voluntarily remained to provide protective fire for the retiring elements, ignoring the pleadings of his comrades to fall back. Detecting a column of enemy troops moving toward friendly positions, he swept the hostile soldiers with deadly, accurate fire, killing the entire group. His destructive retaliation caused the enemy to concentrate vicious fire on his position and enabled the friendly elements to affect a withdrawal. After the strong point was re-secured, Kravitz' body was found lying beside the gun he had so heroically manned, and numerous enemy dead lay in and around his emplacement.

Master Sgt. Juan E. Negrón



- **Born:** Sept. 26, 1929, in Corozal, Puerto Rico
- **Died:** March 29, 1996, in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, at age 66
- **Date of action:** April 28, 1951, near Kalma-Eri, Korea
- **Unit:** 65th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division

Negrón, then a sergeant, took up the most vulnerable position on his company's exposed right flank after an enemy force had overrun a section of the line. When notified that elements of the company were withdrawing, Negrón refused to leave his exposed position, but delivered withering fire at hostile troops who had broken through a roadblock. When the hostile troops approached his position, Negrón accurately hurled hand grenades at short range, halting their attack. He held the position throughout the night as an allied counter attack was organized and launched. After the enemy had been repulsed, 15 enemy dead were found only a few feet from Negrón's position.

Master Sgt. Mike C. Peña



Under cover of darkness and an obscuring mist, an enemy battalion had moved up to within a few yards of Peña's platoon. Observing the enemy, Peña and his men immediately opened fire. But the sudden, point-blank fire of the hostile forces made it necessary for the friendly troops to withdraw. Rapidly reorganizing his men, Peña led them in a counter-attack, regained the lost positions, and attempted to hold back the enemy. Despite the devastating fire laid down by the friendly troops, the enemy continued to hurl themselves at the defenses in overwhelming numbers. Realizing that a scarcity of ammunition would soon make the positions untenable, Peña ordered his men to fall back, manning a machine gun to cover their withdrawal. Single-handedly, he held back the enemy until the early hours of the following morning when his position was overrun and he was killed.

- **Born:** Nov. 6, 1924, in Newgulf, Texas
- **Killed in Action:** Sept. 5, 1950, near Waegwan, Korea, at age 25
- **Unit:** F Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division

Pfc. Demensio Rivera



When the outpost area occupied by Rivera's platoon was assaulted during the night, Rivera, an automatic rifleman, held his forward position tenaciously, though exposed to very heavy fire. With his automatic rifle, he delivered a continuous and devastating fire at the approaching enemy until this weapon became inoperative, whereupon he employed his pistol and grenades and stopped the enemy within a few feet of his position. During a renewed attack, he fought the enemy hand-to-hand and forced them back. Finally, as an overwhelming number of the enemy closed in on him, he killed four of them with his only remaining grenade. However, they were in such close proximity, he was severely wounded by the same explosion and soon succumbed to his injuries.

- **Born:** April 29, 1933, in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico
- **Died of wounds incurred in action:** May 23, 1951, at Changyongni, Korea, at age 18
- **Unit:** G Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division

Pvt. Miguel A. Vera



- **Born:** May 3, 1932, in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico
- **Killed in Action:** Sept. 21, 1952, in Chorwon, Korea, at age 20
- **Unit:** F Company, 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division

Vera's unit was committed to assaulting and securing the right sector of "Old Baldy" hill and, though he was wounded in an earlier engagement, he voluntarily re-joined elements of the platoon regrouping at the base of the hill to resume the attack. Forging up the bare, rocky slope, the troops came to within 20 yards of hostile positions when they were subjected to heavy artillery and mortar barrages, and intense crossfire from automatic weapons and grenades, which forced them to move back. Vera selflessly remained behind to cover the withdrawal and, maintaining a determined stand, poured crippling fire into enemy emplacements until he was killed.

Sgt. Jack Weinstein



- **Born:** Oct. 18, 1928, in Cheyenne County, Kan.
- **Died:** April 20, 2006, at St. Francis, Kan., at age 77
- **Date of action:** Oct. 19, 1951, near Kumson, Korea
- **Unit:** G Company, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division

Weinstein was in the lead as the first platoon of his company attempted to take an enemy-held position near Hill 533. After gaining the ground, the platoon was hit by a fierce counter-attack by about 30 Chinese troops. As most of the members of the platoon had been wounded in the previous action, they withdrew under the heavy attack. Weinstein, however, remained in his position and continued to fight off the onrushing enemy. At least six of the enemies were killed by Weinstein's M-1 rifle before he ran out of ammunition. Though under extremely heavy enemy fire, he refused to withdraw and continued fighting by throwing enemy hand grenades that were lying near his position. He held out against overwhelming odds until another platoon was able to relieve him and drive back the enemy. Weinstein's leg had been broken by an enemy grenade and old wounds suffered in previous battles had reopened, but he refused to withdraw so that his wounded comrades could reach friendly lines.

World War II

Pvt. Pedro Cano



- **Born:** June 19, 1920, in La Morita, Nuevo León, Mexico
- **Died:** June 24, 1952, in Pharr, Texas, at age 32
- **Date of action:** Dec. 2–3, 1944, near Schevenhütte, Germany
- **Unit:** C Company, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division

When his company became halted in the Hürtgen Forest by intense enemy machine-gun fire, Cano, armed with a rocket launcher, crawled through a heavily mined area under a hail of fire to reach a point within 10 yards of the nearest emplacement. He fired a rocket into the position, killing the two gunners and five supporting riflemen; fired into a second position, killing two more gunners; and with hand grenades, killed or dispersed several other enemy riflemen. Then, when an adjacent company encountered heavy fire, Cano crossed his company front, crept to within 15 yards of the nearest enemy emplacement, and killed the two machine-gunners with a rocket. With another round, he killed two more gunners and destroyed a second gun. On the following day, when his company renewed the attack and again encountered heavy machine-gun fire, Cano, armed again with his rocket launcher, went forward over fire-swept terrain and destroyed three enemy machine-guns in succession, killing the six gunners. His daring actions, without thought of his own safety, permitted the advance of his company.

Pvt. Joe Gandara



- **Born:** April 25, 1924, in Santa Monica, Calif.
- **Killed in Action:** June 9, 1944, in Amfreville, France, at age 20
- **Unit:** D Company, 2nd Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division

When Gandara's detachment came under devastating enemy fire from a strong German force, pinning the men to the ground for a period of 4 hours, Gandara advanced voluntarily and alone toward the enemy position. Firing his machine gun from a carrying position as he moved forward, he destroyed three hostile machine guns before he was fatally wounded. By his selfless devotion to duty and outstanding valor, Gandara prevented heavy casualties in his detachment.

Staff Sgt. Salvador J. Lara



- **Born:** in 1920 in Riverside, Calif.
- **Died:** Sept. 1, 1945, near Saint-Avold, France, (non-battle) at age 25
- **Date of Action:** May 27–28, 1944, in Aprilia, Italy
- **Unit:** L Company, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division

During an attack on strongly fortified enemy positions, Lara (then a private first class) led his rifle squad aggressively in neutralizing one enemy strong-point after another and in killing large numbers of the enemy. Having taken his initial objective, Lara observed that the unit on his right was meeting stiff resistance from a large enemy force, well entrenched in a deep ditch. Taking three men with him, he attacked a wide section of the enemy position, killing four of the enemy, forcing 15 others to surrender, and causing two enemy mortar crews to abandon their weapons. When his company resumed the attack the following morning, Lara sustained a severe leg wound, but did not stop to receive first aid, saying that his men needed him in the attack. In an attempt to destroy an enemy strong point that was raining withering machine-gun fire onto his company, Lara crawled alone with a Browning automatic rifle toward the nearest machine gun. Despite his painful wounds, Lara rose and unhesitatingly charged the nest, killing its three crew members. Another machine gun opened fire on him, but he quickly neutralized this weapon with accurate fire and killed three more enemies. His aggressive attack forced two other machine gun crews to flee their weapons.

Staff Sgt. William F. Leonard



- **Born:** Aug. 9, 1913, in Lockport, N.J.
- **Died:** Aug. 4, 1985, in Lockport at age 72
- **Date of action:** Nov. 7, 1944, near Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, France
- **Unit:** C Company, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division

When his platoon was reduced to eight men by blistering artillery, mortar, machine-gun and rifle fire, Leonard, then a private first class, led the survivors in an assault over a tree- and shrub-covered hill continuously swept by automatic fire. Killing two snipers at ranges of 50 and 75 yards, Leonard disregarded bullets that pierced his back to engage and destroy a machine gun with rifle grenades, killing its two-man crew. Though stunned by an exploding bazooka shell, he continued his relentless advance to knock out a second machine gun and capture a roadblock objective.

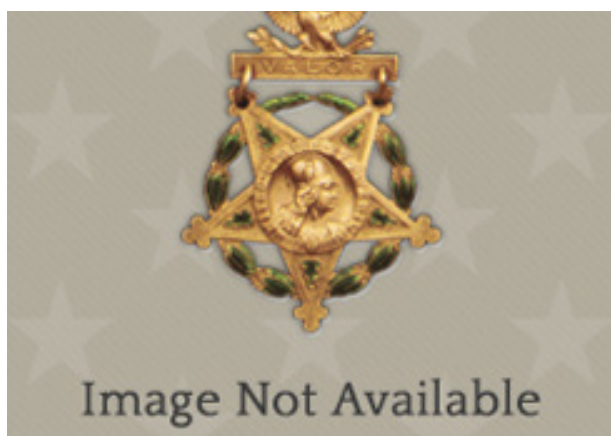
Master Sgt. Manuel V. Mendoza



- **Born:** June 15, 1922, in Miami, Ariz.
- **Died:** in 2001 in Miami at age 79
- **Date of action:** Oct. 4, 1944, in Mt. Battaglia, Italy
- **Unit:** B Company, 250th Infantry Regiment, 88th Infantry Division

When German soldiers launched a violent counterattack preceded by a heavy mortar barrage, Mendoza, then a platoon sergeant who was already wounded in the arm and leg, grabbed a Thompson sub-machine gun and ran to the crest of a hill, where he saw approximately 200 enemy troops charging up the slopes, employing flame-throwers, machine pistols, rifles and hand grenades. Mendoza immediately began to engage the enemy, firing five clips and killing 10 enemy soldiers. After exhausting his ammunition, he picked up a carbine and emptied its magazine at the enemy. By that time, an enemy soldier with a flamethrower had almost reached the crest, but was quickly eliminated as Mendoza drew his pistol and fired. Seeing that the enemy force continued to advance, Mendoza jumped into a machine gun emplacement that had just been abandoned and opened fire. Unable to engage the entire enemy force from his location, he picked up the machine gun and moved forward, firing from his hip and spraying a withering hail of bullets into the oncoming enemy, causing them to break into confusion. He then set the machine gun on the ground and continued to fire until the gun jammed. Without hesitating, Mendoza then began throwing hand grenades at the enemy, causing them to flee. After the enemy had withdrawn, he advanced down the forward slope of the hill, retrieved numerous enemy weapons scattered about the area, captured a wounded enemy soldier, and returned to the consolidated friendly positions. Mendoza's gallant stand resulted in thirty enemy soldiers killed and the successful defense of the hill.

Sgt. Alfred B. Nietzel



- **Born:** April 27, 1921, in Queens, N.Y.
- **Killed in Action:** Nov. 18, 1944, in Heistern, Germany, at age 23
- **Unit:** H Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division

When an enemy assault threatened to overrun his unit's position, Nietzel selflessly covered for the retreating members of his squad, expending all his ammunition and holding his post until he was killed by an enemy hand grenade.

1st Lt. Donald K. Schwab



Ordered to overwhelm an enemy line in a fringe of woods, Schwab organized his company into a skirmish line and, with indomitable courage, led them forward across 400 yards of bare, coverless ground into the lethal enemy fire. When halted, Schwab went from man to man to supervise collection of the wounded and organize the withdrawal of his company. He rallied his decimated force for another charge on the hostile strong point, worked his way to within 50 yards of the Germans and ordered his men to “hit the dirt.” While automatic weapons fire blazed around him, he rushed forward alone, firing his carbine at the German foxholes, straight for the key enemy machine pistol nest which had spark-plugged German resistance and caused heavy casualties among his men. Spotlit through the mist and rain by enemy flares, he reached the German emplacement. Ripping off the shelter half-cover of the hostile firing pit, he clouted the German gunner on the head with his carbine butt and dragged him back, through a hall of fire, to friendly lines. His action so disorganized hostile infantry resistance that the enemy withdrew.

- **Born:** Dec. 6, 1918, in Hooper, Neb.
- **Died:** Feb. 19, 2005, in Hooper at the age of 86
- **Date of Action:** Sept. 17, 1944, near Lure, France
- **Unit:** E Company, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division

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