

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
MEDALS OF HONOR PRESENTATION

THE EAST ROOM

3:09 P.M. EST

Secretary Schlesinger, Secretary Callaway, our distinguished recipients, ladies and gentlemen:

It is, of course, a great blessing that the last American soldier is home from the battlefields of Vietnam. Our landing ships again, fortunately, have long since departed those distant shores, and our planes have long ago flown their last mission on the war across those faraway jungles.

Let us, individually and collectively, fervently pray that Vietnam was indeed the last -- our last war.

We are, however, reminded of Vietnam today, of that long and painful time by two men who lived it and whose actions will never die in the annals of the United States military history.

For the Nation they served bestows on them today the Congressional Medal of Honor for their acts of courage above and beyond the call of duty.

The United States Army Warrant Officer Louis R. Rocco -- Sergeant First Class in Vietnam -- and Army Staff Sergeant John R. Cavaiani, by the courage of their acts, carried forward the long and very proud military tradition of selfless dedication to the cause of freedom.

Army Warrant Officer Louis Rocco distinguished himself on May 24, 1970. He volunteered to help evacuate eight critically wounded South Vietnamese troops under attack. His helicopter crash-landed at the evacuation site under intense enemy fire.

Ignoring a fractured wrist and a broken hip and a severely bruised back, Warrant Officer Rocco pulled the unconscious survivors from the burning wreckage. His hands were severely burned, causing him excruciating pain. He nevertheless carried each of his unconscious comrades more than 20 yards through enemy fire to friendly positions.

MORE

(OVER)

Trained in first aid, he administered to them before collapsing into unconsciousness.

Warrant Officer Rocco's bravery was directly responsible for saving three of his fellow soldiers from certain death. His gallantry, disregarding his own pain and injuries, is in the highest tradition of self-sacrifice and courage in our military service.

I say to his family here today, you also walk in the respect and admiration of your country and of your President.

Sergeant Cavaiani was believed to have been killed in action when recommended for the Medal of Honor. It was only later learned that he had been captured. He was a prisoner of war for more than two years and was repatriated on July 10, 1973.

On June 4 and 5, 1971, he served as a platoon leader, providing security for an isolated radio relay site within enemy-held territory.

The Sergeant's unit was attacked by a superior enemy force. For those two days, firing with different weapons, Sergeant Cavaiani directed the evacuation of some of his platoon by helicopter while ordering the others to escape -- many were able to do so.

He remained, however, exposing himself to heavy enemy fire. Sergeant Cavaiani was wounded numerous times, finally falling to his captors.

We are honored that the Sergeant's family is here with us today. The President of the United States wishes to tell them in person that Sergeant Cavaiani is an American of extraordinary heroism and his valor reflects well on all of them.

This day is witness to the fact that the bravest of the brave still rise from among our people, that freedom and that justice have survived and will survive, that peace is still our most precious and enduring goal, and that we, the American people, will forever cherish the noble deeds, the noble ideals entrusted to us these past two centuries by our forefathers.

These ideals do not sleep, they are not silent; they live among us here today in the presence of Jon Robert Cavaiani, and Louis Richard Rocco and their families.

The Secretary of the Army will now read the citations.

MORE

(Reading of Citations)

Thank you very much, Secretary Callaway, Secretary Schlesinger, ladies and gentlemen. I thank you all for being here.

It is a wonderful occasion paying tribute and honor to two very gallant and wonderful soldiers in the very highest and the very best traditions of the United States military service.

I suggest now that we all might go into the State Dining Room and have some refreshments.

END (AT 3:25 P.M. EST)