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By J.D. Leipold
Army News Service

WASHINGTON, March 19, 2014 – Twenty-four U.S. Army veterans from three wars -- World War II, Korea and Vietnam -- received upgrades to the highest military decoration for uncommon bravery and gallantry at a White House ceremony yesterday.

President Barack Obama presented posthumous Medals of Honor to family members and representatives of 21 of those soldiers, and draped the sky-blue ribbon and five-pointed star-bearing medals around the necks of the three living veterans from the Vietnam War.

Each of the 24 had received a Distinguished Service Cross for the same fearless actions for which they were now receiving long overdue upgrades to the Medal of Honor.

"This ceremony is 70 years in the making and today, we have the chance to set the record straight," the president said, noting that more than a decade ago Congress mandated a review to ensure heroism of veterans wasn't overlooked due to prejudice or discrimination. During that review, the 24 soldiers -- Hispanic, Jewish and African-American -- were identified as deserving of the Medal of Honor.

"This is the length to which America will go to make sure everyone who serves under our proud flag receives the thanks that they deserve," Obama said. "So with each generation, we keep on striving to live up to our ideals of freedom and equality, and to recognize the dignity and patriotism of every person, no matter who they are, what they look like, or how they pray."

Obama invited each living soldier to the stage, one at a time, dressed in uniforms they could have worn in their 20s, but they now were filling out in their 70s with a full complement of ribbons and badges that testified to their skills as young soldiers. Their citations were read, their Medals of Honor were draped, and handshakes were exchanged.

"These are extraordinary Americans. They are exemplary soldiers," the president said.

Following the presentation to the three Vietnam veterans, Obama called them all to the stage.

"Santiago Erevia, Melvin Morris, Jose Rodela -- in the thick of the fight, all those years ago, for your comrades and your country, you refused to yield," he said. "On behalf of a grateful nation, we all want to thank you for inspiring us -- then and now -- with your strength, your will, and your heroic hearts."

Sons, daughters, nephews, brothers, wives, friends and representatives of the 21 soldiers who didn't live to receive the long-overdue recognition each were called to the stage to hear their soldier's citation read aloud for a final time.

While some fought tears, others smiled, faintly remembering. Then each was presented with the framed citation and Medal of Honor their soldier had earned. There was little doubt their soldiers would never be forgotten again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is very rare where we have the opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary courage and patriotism of such a remarkable collection of men," Obama concluded. "We are so grateful to them, we are so grateful to their families, it makes us proud and it makes us inspired."

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