

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Gunnery Sergeant John L. Canley

October 17, 2018

Thank you very much. Thank you. And thank you very much, Chaplain. Appreciate it. Please sit down.

Vice President Mike Pence, thank you for joining us for today's ceremony. This is always one of my favorite events. I like brave people. We meet them right here.

Fifty years ago, an American marine fought with unmatched bravery in one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War, the Battle of Hue City. The name of that heroic Marine is Sergeant Major John Canley. *[Applause]* I think you like him. *[Laughter]*

Today we proudly award John the congressional Medal of Honor. John's family is with us to pay tribute: his children Ricky, Yukari, and Patricia; along with his two grandchildren Viktoria and Candice. Thank you very much for being here. Appreciate it. Also with us is John's cousin, who has always been like a brother to him, James Canley. James, thank you very much. Stand up, James.

We're grateful to be joined by Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan—thanks, Patrick; Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford. Hey, John, there are some pretty big people over here, when you hear that, right? *[Laughter]* These are the biggest. These are the biggest, John.

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Peter. Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller. Thank you. Thank you, General. *[Applause]* Stand up, Robert. Come on. Stand up. Thank you, Robert. Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green. And—*[applause]*. You know, it's like old family week, huh? *[Laughter]*

Boy, here's a marine I like a lot that we all know, we all love. He's doing a fantastic job. Four-star General John Kelly. Stand up. And thank you as well to Congresswoman Julia Brownley for being with us. Thank you. Thank you, Julia. Thank you very much.

We are especially thankful to be joined by five previous Medal of Honor recipients: Donald Ballard; Harvey Barnum—please stand as I call you name; Roger Donlon; Thomas Kelley; and Brian Thacker.

Sergeant Major John Canley was born in Caledonia, Arkansas. In 1953, at the age of 15, John used his brother's paperwork to enlist in the United States Marines. *[Laughter]* No, we didn't know that, John. *[Laughter]* John served in South Korea and Japan, before shipping out to Vietnam for more than 5 years of intense combat.

On January 30, 1968, Vietnamese families gathered to celebrate the Lunar New Year, known as Tet. In the midst of the celebration, thousands of North Vietnamese Communists launched surprise attacks all over and throughout the country. This became known as the Tet Offensive, one of the largest enemy offenses that we've ever seen and certainly of the Vietnam War.

Within the first day, the communists seized control of a vital American stronghold, Hue City. At the time of the attack, John was a Gunnery Sergeant with Alpha Company, First Battalion, First Marine Regiment. This company of roughly 150 marines was tasked to help take back the city.

On their way, the enemy attacked them with machineguns, mortars, rockets, and everything else they had. John's friend Pat Fraleigh was struck by a rocket explosion and was about to be run over by a tank when John charged through enemy fire and carried him back to safety.

Today, 50 years later, Pat is here with us at the White House to honor the hero who saved his life. Thank you for being here, Pat. Where's Pat? Pat. That's great, Pat. Thank you very much. I knew you'd have no problem getting up. [*Laughter*] That's great. Thank you, Pat.

Early in the battle, John's commanding officer was seriously wounded. Command then fell to John, who quickly organized his men and led them through the fight. One of his fellow warriors who joins us today, John Ligato, said: "You followed him because he was a true leader. He was totally fearless. He loved his Marines, and we loved him back." Where is John? Where are you, John? Stand up, John. Beautiful. Thank you. Thank you very much for being here.

By the end of the day, John and his company of less than 150 marines had successfully pushed into the city which was held by 6,000—at least—communist fighters.

In the days that followed, John led his company through the fog and rain, and in house-to-house—very vicious, very hard—combat. He assaulted enemy strongholds; killed enemy fighters; and, with deadly accuracy, did everything you had to do. He raced into heavy machine-gun fire on many occasions, all to save his fellow Marines. In one harrowing engagement after another, John risked his own life to save the lives of those under his command.

During the fifth day of combat, John and his company were tasked with liberating the Joan of Arc School, which had become a strategic and symbolic stronghold of the Communists' control of the city. As soon as John's company arrived, communist forces unleashed their machineguns with tremendous velocity, tremendous violence, all at the Marines. Undeterred, John and his comrade Sergeant Alfredo Gonzalez fearlessly charged forward with rocket launchers, killing the enemy and driving them from their positions. The enemy didn't know what the hell happened. [*Laughter*]

During this daring maneuver, Sergeant Gonzalez was shot and killed, giving his life for his nation and for his fellow Marines. Today we are honored to be joined by Sergeant Gonzalez's mother—who I just met, who is incredible—Maria. Where is Maria? Maria. There's Maria. Thank you, Maria. Everybody in this room had great respect for your son. You know that. Thank you very much.

We are also joined by Henry Murphy, whose brother Walter died fighting courageously in the Battle of Hue City. And Henry—where are you, Henry? Please stand up.

To Maria and Henry: We are eternally in your debt. Sergeant Gonzalez and Major Murphy are heroes who will live forever in the hearts of all Americans. Thank you both very much for being here. Thank you. Thank you very much.

As the battle raged on, Sergeant Major John Canley fought his way inside the Joan of Arc School. There, he and his fellow marines went room to room, in brutal, close-quarters combat.

John raced straight into enemy fire over and over again, saving numerous American lives, and defeating a large group of communist fighters.

After an intense day of fighting, John and his fellow marines liberated the school. But John wasn't done yet. Despite sustaining serious injuries—very, very serious injuries—he continued to face down the enemy with no thought for his own safety. John waged 7 straight days of unrelenting combat, personally saving the lives of more than 20 marines. By the battle's end, American marines had defeated the Communists and taken back the city.

Today we are joined by more than 30 of the brave Marines who fought with valor in the Battle of Hue City. Would you please stand? You make us all very proud. Thank you for being here. Thank you very much.

Sergeant Major John Canley continued his service long after Vietnam, training thousands of marines in combat drills and overseas. Now, at 80 years old—you don't look 80 years old to me. *[Laughter]* Looks like we could put him in, Joe, right away. Right? Nobody would know the difference, right? *[Laughter]* That's really great. He still goes to the gym. I asked him that question. I said, "How are you keeping in shape?" "I still work out, sir." *[Laughter]* It's beautiful. And he goes right on base right near his home in California and gives advice to young marines.

John's fellow marines have described him as a "marine warrior"—and I can see it—who is "bigger than life and beyond the reach of death." He is truly larger than life. John, it is because of your extraordinary personality and being and whatever it takes that really do something very special for our country. America is the greatest force for peace, justice, and freedom the world has ever known because of you and people like you. There are very few. There are very few. Brave people—but very, very few like you, John.

It is now my incredible privilege to present Sergeant Major John Canley with the congressional Medal of Honor. Now I'd like to ask the Military Aide to come forward and read the citation. Thank you.

[At this point, Cmdr. Jeffrey C. Bender, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citation, and the President presented the medal, assisted by Maj. Rogelio Maese, USMC, Marine Corps Aide to the President. Following the presentation of the medal, Lt. Cmdr. Robert L. Crabb, USN, chaplain, Navy Chaplain Corps, said a prayer.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:11 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Patricia Sargent, daughter, Viktoria Sargent, granddaughter, and L.J. Canley, brother, of GySgt. Canley (Ret.); and White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the citation.

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