

**Remarks on Presenting the
Congressional Medal of Honor
to Captain Ed W. Freeman**

July 16, 2001

The President. Please be seated. Good morning, and welcome to the White House. Today, for the first time, I will present the Medal of Honor. It's a unique privilege to present the Nation's highest military distinction to Ed Freeman of Boise, Idaho. This moment is well deserved, and it's been long in coming.

Our White House military unit is accustomed to a lot of great events, but I can assure you they started this day with a great sense of anticipation. After all, they know how rare this kind of gathering is and what it means. To be in the presence of one who has won the Medal of Honor is a privilege; to be in the room with a group of over 50 is a moment none of us will ever forget. We're in the presence of more than 50 of the bravest men who have ever worn the uniform, and I want to welcome you all to the White House.

It's an honor, as well, to welcome Barbara—a name I kind of like—[*laughter*—Ed's wife, along with his family members and members of his unit from Vietnam. As well, I want to welcome the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Chief of the Joint Chiefs, as well as members of the Joint Chiefs. I want to welcome Senator McCain. I want to welcome Senator Craig, Congressman Otter, and Congressman Simpson from the delegation of Idaho. I want to welcome you all.

It was in this house, in this office upstairs, that Abraham Lincoln signed into law the bills establishing the Medal of Honor. By a custom that began with Theodore Roosevelt, the Medal of Honor is to be presented by the President. That duty came to Harry S. Truman more than 70 times. He often said that he'd rather wear the medal than to be the Commander in Chief. Some of you might have heard him say that. [*Laughter*] Perhaps you were also here on May 2, 1963, when John F. Kennedy welcomed 240 recipients of the Medal of Honor.

By all rights, another President from Texas should have had the honor of conferring this medal. It was in the second year of Lyndon Johnson's Presidency that Army Captain Ed Freeman did something that the men of the 7th Cavalry have never forgotten. Years pass, even decades, but the memory of what happened on November 14, 1965, has always stayed with them.

For his actions that day, Captain Freeman was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. But the men who were there, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Crandall, felt a still higher honor was called for. Through the unremitting efforts of Lieutenant Colonel Crandall and many others, and the persuasive weight from Senator John McCain, the story now comes to its rightful conclusion.

That story began with the battalion surrounded by the enemy in one of Vietnam's fiercest battles. The survivors remember the desperate fear of almost certain death. They remember gunfire that one witness described as the most intense he had ever seen. And they remember the sight of an unarmed helicopter coming to their aid.

The man at the controls flew through the gunfire not once, not 10 times, but at least 21 times. That single helicopter brought the water, ammunition, and supplies that saved many lives on the ground. And the same pilot flew more than 70 wounded soldiers to safety.

In a moment, we will hear the full citation, in all its heroic detail. General Eisenhower once observed that when you hear a Medal of Honor citation, you practically assume that the man in question didn't make it out alive. In fact, about one in six never did. And the other five, men just like you all here, probably didn't expect to.

Citations are also written in the most simple of language, needing no embellishment or techniques of rhetoric. They record places and names and events that describe themselves. The medal itself bears only one word, and needs only one: Valor.

As a boy of 13, Ed Freeman saw thousands of men on maneuvers pass by his home in Mississippi. He decided then and there that he would be a soldier. A lifetime later, the Congress has now decided that he's even

more than a soldier, because he did more than his duty. He served his country and his comrades to the fullest, rising above and beyond anything the Army or the Nation could have ever asked.

It's been some years now since he left the service and was last saluted. But from this day, wherever he goes, by military tradition, Ed Freeman will merit a salute from any enlisted personnel or officer of rank.

Commander Severs, I now ask you to read this citation of the newest member of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. And it will be my honor to give him his first salute.

[At this point, Comdr. Paul J. Severs, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citation, and the President presented the medal.]

The President. We'll see you for a reception. Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:35 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Remarks on Accepting a Bust of Winston Churchill and an Exchange With Reporters

July 16, 2001

The President. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

I think I casually mentioned to the Ambassador, right after my swearing-in, that I lamented the fact that there was not a proper bust of Winston Churchill for me to put in the Oval Office. He's a man of great action, because here sits a bust on loan from Her Majesty's Government that I accept gratefully and will place right here, where the flowers are, beneath one of my favorite west Texas paintings. I accept gratefully, and I look forward to looking at Sir Winston on a daily basis.

People said, "Why would you be interested in having the bust of an Englishman in your Oval Office?" And the answer is, because he was one of the great leaders in the 20th century. He was an enormous personality. He stood on principle. He was a man of great courage. He knew what he believed, and he really kind of went after it in a way that seemed like a Texan to me: He wasn't afraid of public opinion polls; he wasn't afraid of—

he didn't need focus groups to tell him what was right. He charged ahead, and the world is better for it.

He also had a great sense of humor. There have been a lot of Churchill stories, some of which you can repeat on TV, some of which you can't, Mr. Ambassador. One that came to mind was, after he lost office in the election in 1945, King George VI offered him the Order of the Garter. And here is what he said: "I could hardly accept His Majesty's offer of the Garter when his people have given me the order of the boot." [Laughter]

Churchill reminds me of two things—one, we need more humor in the public arena. He had a great wit. He had a fantastic way of making people smile and laugh. And secondly, he reminds me of the importance of our relationship, the relationship between Great Britain and America.

As the Ambassador mentions, in a couple of days' time, I will go to confirm and renew that relationship. Not only will I have the honor of meeting with Her Majesty; I will also spend some quality time again with the Prime Minister. We've got a strong personal relationship that is most helpful to making sure our countries continue the tie that binds.

I'm looking forward to my trip overseas. And a perfect way to begin is to stop off in London and then, eventually, go to Chequers, and then—and have a very constructive and honest and straightforward dialog about areas where we cooperate to make the world a better place.

In the meantime, Mr. Ambassador, I'm honored that you came by. Thank you very much for bringing Sir Winston. I look forward to visiting with him. Sometimes he'll talk back; sometimes he won't, depending upon the stress of the moment. But he is a constant reminder of what a great leader is like.

So, thank you for coming, sir.

United Kingdom-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, is the special relationship as healthy today as it was in Churchill's time?

The President. I think it is. I do. We cooperate in the Balkans. The Prime Minister and I talk quite frequently on issues that are