



## 'Visions of Valor' portraits honor heroes

By Ann Patton  
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U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY, Colo. (AFNS) -- "Visions of Valor" are on display at the U.S. Air Force Academy as a collection of black-and-white portrait photographs of 140 Medal of Honor recipients was presented by TriWest Health Alliance officials April 3 at the McDermott Library here.

David McIntyre, the TriWest chief executive officer, expressed gratitude to the five Medal of Honor recipients who were present for their service.

"Thank you for illuminating the path," he said, and noted the collection reflects the pride and sense of duty in such service. "Cadets will follow in footsteps of greatness."

Speaking to the Medal of Honor recipients, Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley said, "All of you are true American heroes. These photographs are a wonderful homage to America's most revered heroes."

At the ceremony, guests and Medal of Honor recipients included retired Lt. Col. Joe Jackson who rescued a three-man Air Force combat control team in Vietnam; retired Col. Bernard Fisher who held off hostile gun positions in the rescue of a downed pilot in Vietnam; former Army Sgt. Peter Lemon who used machine gun and rifle fire, grenades and hand-to-hand combat in defense of a fire support base in Vietnam; and former Army Pfc. George Sakato who led the assault to rescue members of the "Lost Battalion" from the Germans during World War II.

Also on hand was honoree retired Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness who was shot down in Vietnam on his 93rd mission while defending U.S. helicopters from MiG fighters. He spent six years as a prisoner of war.

During his Medal of Honor perspective during the ceremony, Mr. Thorsness stressed many others also deserved to be honored.

"We wear this for everyone," he said of the medal. "Everybody is just a regular guy. They trained well and did their job."



*Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley unveils a portrait of retired Col. Bernard Fisher during the "Visions of Valor" dedication April 3 at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado. Participating is Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. John F. Regni and David J. McIntyre, the TriWest CEO. Colonel Fisher is the first living Air Force recipient of the Medal of Honor, and the first Air Force member to receive this medal for an act of heroism during the Vietnam War without being killed in action. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Mike Kaplan)*

Mr. Thorsness also reminded those present freedoms are not to be taken for granted.

"We are so fortunate to have these rights," he said. "All of us are free to choose our professions, our jobs."

He also reflected on the personal impact of his imprisonment.

"I never truly have a bad day now. We're stronger than we think we are," he said. Also present was the photographer for the "Visions of Valor" portraits, Nick Del Calzo. The Denver resident who started photographing Medal of Honor honorees in 1999 in cooperation with the Medal of Honor Society.

"It's an ongoing process. I was on a plane every week, and it was fun," he said, and added a small handful of recipients have yet to be photographed.

The project required travel to 35 states.

His book and national exhibition, "The Triumphant Spirit: Portraits & Stories of Holocaust Survivors," received high accolades from many sources, including CNN and the American Library Associations.

His second book, "Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty," features 116 Medal of Honor recipients.

The journalist, public relations professional and photographer regards the project as his way of saying thank you to veterans.

A self-described "fierce patriot," Mr. Del Calzo used national monuments as backdrops for a large number of the Medal of Honor portraits.

"Our monuments are so meaningful and beautiful," he said. "I wanted to associate the images with the individuals."

Among others, the Vietnam, Korean War and Lincoln memorials, Mount Rushmore and the White House have appeared in his photographs.

"I wanted to preserve a sense of reverence for the meaning and value of the medal," he said.

TriWest previously presented a "Visions of Valor" collection to the Pentagon, which now hangs in the Pentagon Library and Conference Center.

Twenty of the 24 feet by 30 feet Academy photographs were framed and on display during the presentation. Academy museum specialist Paul Martin said the remainder will be framed at a later date, and the Academy is exploring potential display areas.

"We want these portraits to communicate the values of 'service before self' and patriotism to the cadets," Mr. Martin said. "We are considering locations in the cadet area for their permanent home."

Fewer than 110 recipients are still living. A total of 3,447 Medal of Honors have been presented in the course of U.S. history.

## Additional photos



*Lt. Gen. John F. Regni (left to right), David J. McIntyre, retired Col. Bernard Fisher, Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley, Col. Leo Thorsness, and Col. Joe Jackson stand next to an unveiled portrait of Colonel Fisher during the "Visions of Valor" dedication April 3 at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado. General Regni is the Academy superintendent, Mr. McIntyre is the TriWest CEO, and Colonel Fisher is the first living Air Force recipient of the Medal of Honor, and the first Air Force member to receive this medal for an act of heroism during the Vietnam War without being killed in action. Colonel Thorsness and Jackson are Medal of Honor recipients. U.S. Air Force photo/Mike Kaplan)*



*Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley briefs the U.S. Air Force Academy cadet wing during a cadet call held at Arnold Hall April 3 at the Academy in Colorado. The secretary talked with the cadets about leadership and reminded them of the strength diversity brings to the total force. (U.S. Air Force photo/Mike Kaplan)*



*Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley briefs the U.S. Air Force Academy cadet wing during a cadet call held at Arnold Hall April 3 at the Academy in Colorado. The secretary also answered cadet's questions that ranged in issues from the plans for a new unmanned aircraft system careerfield to impacts the increased deployments to Afghanistan will have on the Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Mike Kaplan)*



*Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley briefs the U.S. Air Force Academy cadet wing during a cadet call held at Arnold Hall April 3 at the Academy in Colorado. The cadets also asked questions of the secretary, everything from current operations in cyberspace to budget challenges balancing current and future resource requirements. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Mike Kaplan)*



*Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley accepts "The Bird" from cadet wing commander Cadet 1st Class Johathan Yates during a cadet call held at Arnold Hall April 3 at the Academy in Colorado. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Mike Kaplan)*