

Visions of Valor exhibit stops at depot

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MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT SAN DIEGO (Nov. 22, 2006) -- A display of photographs and biographies featuring Medal of Honor recipients was opened for the public to view at James L. Day Hall, the depot command museum, on Nov. 9.

The traveling exhibit was graced with the presence of two Medal of Honor recipients, John Baca and James A. Taylor, who both spoke to the attendees during the grand opening of the TriWest sponsored "Visions of Valor" exhibition, which will remain on the depot until Jan. 9, 2007.

There are 140 portraits and citations of the recipients of the nation's highest military decoration, which has been earned by men who showed uncommon valor in combat.

"A lot of Marines, sailors and soldiers have received awards during the war on terrorism and still don't understand the significance of the Medal of Honor," said Barbara McCurtis, director of the depot museum. "This exhibit highlights the men who made the ultimate sacrifice and left the battlefield with the most respected award that is presented by our nation."

Many of the Medal of Honor recipients received the award posthumously, and the fewer than 120 recipients who are alive today continue to inspire those who will survive them.

Their history is honored through the traveling exhibit, said McCurtis. It allows the men and women of the United States to put faces along with the stories of these brave and noble men as the exhibit passes through the cities of the country.

Their portraits attribute quotes directly from the mouths of the recipients, which gives the exhibit a more personal touch, McCurtis added.

"Visions of Valor" brings a sense of history to the museum in a way that differs from the other exhibits there. It personalizes the medal recipients featured.

Having living recipients at the exhibit's opening helped enhance the visitors' understanding of these heroic men's deeds.

"All the men in these pictures symbolize a family I never had, and to be a part of it is definitely special," said Mr. Baca, a native of San Diego.

"Visions of Valor" is more than just a traveling display of heroes. It is a place where 140 of the more than 3,460 Medal of

Honor recipients in American history are pictured in the same place and time regardless of the era in which they served the United States.

The freedoms America has that most other countries do not, is continually re-established because of the men and woman in the armed forces, said Sgt. Curtis R. Hawkins, depot videographer.

Hawkins, who is from Horseshoe Bend, Idaho, said they not only put their lives on the line for the man next to them, but for the families that remain stateside.

"I know the sacrifices the service members make, and I know how it feels to have someone visit you in the hospital after you are wounded," said Mr. Baca, who visits injured service members at Naval Medical Center San Diego. "With the freedom they give this nation, the least I can do is give my time."

Mr. Baca received the Medal of Honor for his actions in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. He threw himself on an enemy fragmentation grenade, which was covered by his helmet, saving eight men from injury or death.

The common virtues of uncommon valor captured in the portraits of the Medal of Honor recipients will continue to make their way throughout the Western Region of the United States. The recipients' selfless actions will be forever immortalized in the form of this traveling exhibit.

"The humility and heroism of these great patriots shines through every photograph," said David J. McIntyre, TriWest president and CEO. "It is our extreme pleasure to be able to share their incredible faces — and, indeed, incredible stories — with this portrait collection."