

Diné Vietnam veteran receives Purple Heart Medal 56 years after being wounded in battle

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LEUPP, ARIZ. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez offered his support for Purple Heart Medal recipients, their families, and the community of Leupp, Ariz., on Dec. 15 as Military Order of the Purple Heart Department of Arizona Commander Keith Gray officially designated Leupp, Ariz., as a Purple Heart Community during a ceremony held at Leupp Elementary School.

The ceremony also commemorated the military service of Leroy Cody, a member of the Navajo Nation, who finally received the Purple Heart Medal 56 years after being wounded in battle in the Vietnam War. Although he was notified of the award years ago, Cody never received the prestigious medal until the Dec. 15 ceremony. The Purple Heart is one of the military's highest honors and is reserved for U.S. service members who were wounded or killed by enemy action on or after April 5, 1917.

The community of Leupp is also home to three other Diné Purple Heart recipients, including Harry Kee Yazzie, Burt Barton, and Larry Ben. Leupp Chapter President Roberta Gorman, Vice President Angela Horseherder-Cody, and Secretary/Treasurer Calvin Johnson were also in attendance to offer their support and appreciation for the hometown veterans.

"It's a great honor to join the community of Leupp to recognize all Purple Heart Medal recipients, including Mr. Cody who has waited over 50 years for this special moment," Nez said. "It's long overdue and our words are not enough to express our gratitude for his service and all that he endured during the Vietnam War. We honor him, as well as the other recipients, for their gracious service and sacrifice."

Following the presentation of the medal, Cody spoke about being wounded in battle on St. Patrick's Day in Vietnam and nearly succumbing to his wound. He recalled having lost vast

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amounts of blood and having to be resuscitated at one point. He also recognized his fellow comrades for their courage and service during the war.

The Purple Heart Community designation is bestowed by the Military Order of the Purple Heart, an organization for combat-wounded veterans that supports legislative initiatives and provides services for veterans and their families. Leupp as a Purple Heart Community will join the Purple Heart Trail, a national network of roads, bridges, highways and other monuments and trails honoring service members who have received the Purple Heart.

“We have many Diné warriors to be proud of across our Nation. Indigenous people have the highest per capita rate of military service among all demographics in the country,” Nez said. “With this prestigious recognition, we are recommitting ourselves to remember the acts of resiliency and bravery of our men and women in uniform. It is with much admiration, appreciation, and respect that we honor our veterans and Purple Heart recipients,” Nez said.

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