



Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Celiz, and Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee are being awarded the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony today. (COURTESY PHOTOS)

Medal of Honor to be awarded to 3 Army heroes

Three soldiers, each serving at different times in different war zones, are being honored with the nation's highest award for valor.

President Joe Biden will award three Medals of Honor—two posthumously—during a White House ceremony set for this afternoon.

Being honored are Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, who died in 2005 from severe burns after rescuing his fellow soldiers from a burning vehicle in Iraq; Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Celiz, who was killed by enemy fire in Afghanistan in 2018; and Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee, who fought off suicide bombers in Afghanistan in 2013.

Alwyn Cashe

Cashe will be the first Black service member to receive the Medal of Honor

for actions in Iraq or Afghanistan. He is being honored posthumously for his actions while serving as a platoon sergeant with the 3rd Infantry Division's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment.

On Oct. 17, 2005, Cashe and his soldiers were on patrol in Samarra, Iraq, when their Bradley Fighting Vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb and small-arms fire, according to the White House.

The blast ignited the fuel cell on the vehicle, causing fuel to splash everywhere, and the Bradley quickly erupted in flames, according to the citation accompanying the Silver Star awarded to Cashe.

Cashe, who suffered only minor injuries in the initial blast, suffered second- and third-degree burns over 70% of his body when he ran back into the Brad-

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Happy holidays!



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Army Reserve seeks to recruit, retain quality personnel

The Army Reserve has set long-term retention goals as it strives to keep quality soldiers in the ranks despite having missed its recruiting targets for two consecutive years, the component's top enlisted leader said.

In remarks Monday during a webinar hosted by Association of the U.S. Army, Command Sgt. Maj. Andrew Lombardo acknowledged the Reserve missed its fiscal 2021 recruiting goal but added that there are "some positive aspects" that offset the challenge.

"With the recruiting mission, we fell short, but our retention is looking better than ever," Lombardo said during The AUSA Noon Report.

The goal for fiscal 2021 was 189,800 soldiers, but the Reserve instead finished the year with 184,358 soldiers. In fiscal 2020, the Reserve closed out with an end strength of 188,703, just short of its goal of 189,500.

Explaining that "we actually sit pretty well in our force with both lieutenants and specialists," Lombardo said the Reserve has 10,000 more soldiers in the rank of specialist and more than 1,200 lieutenants "than we have structures for."

The challenge now, he said, is to grow the NCO corps and the number of company-grade officers.

"We want to go from a deficit of



Command Sgt. Maj. Andrew Lombardo, senior enlisted leader of the Army Reserve, meets with soldiers at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. (U.S. ARMY/SCOTT STURKOL)

about 2,500 sergeants and about 800 captains to an over strength of 3,000 sergeants and 800 captains by the time we transfer to the next command team in July of 2024," Lombardo said of the plan he and Army Reserve Chief Lt. Gen. Jody Daniels have set in motion.

To achieve this in the next 2 ½ years, he said, the Reserve is looking at how it can use initiatives such as temporary promotions, the Select-

ed Reserve Incentive Program and bonuses of up to \$20,000. It also is looking at how it works with Army Human Resources Command and the Reserve component career counselors who help active-duty soldiers transition to the Reserve.

This could include addressing leaders attending brigade and battalion pre-command courses.

"We're trying to energize our leaders to be part of the solution, to get rid of the red tape, to provide challenging opportunities for these specialists, and maybe to give them the nudge that they need to get promoted and become a noncommissioned officer, to be invested in our organization," he said. "I think we're looking really good to get there this year."

The Reserve is structured to acquire experienced soldiers who transition to the component after active service. Lombardo noted that it's a good path for soldiers who might like to stay in the ranks and continue to enjoy the camaraderie and "the challenges that you could only get through the Army, the Army Reserve and National Guard service."



Army Reserve soldiers participate in a mass reenlistment ceremony at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. (U.S. ARMY/PFC. ELIZABETH HACKBARTH)

New books cover role of special operations troops in Iraq, Afghanistan



Soldiers with the 75th Ranger Regiment conduct room searches in which they detained eight suspected insurgents during an operation to arrest a Taliban leader in Nahr-e Saraj district, Helmand province, Afghanistan. (U.S. ARMY/SPC JUSTIN YOUNG)

As the U.S. military enters a new era of global competition, special operations forces will need to adapt in kind, according to a panel of authors who have written extensively about these troops.

America is at a national security crossroads, said N.W. Collins, author of *Grey Wars: A Contemporary History of U.S. Special Operations*.

“As a country, are we prepared to advance with resolve to strengthen our global footprint? To create dilemmas and impose costs on our adversaries, to identify new strategic investments and to come together in common values in this time of grey wars?” Collins said Dec. 9 during an Association of the U.S. Army Thought Leaders webinar.

The webinar also featured Jessica Donati, author of *Eagle Down: The Last Special Forces Fighting the Forever War*, and Tony Brooks, a former member of the 75th Ranger Regiment and author of *Leave No Man Behind: The Untold Story of the Rangers’ Unrelenting Search for Marcus Luttrell, the Navy SEAL Lone Survivor in Afghanistan*.

Special operations will continue to play a vital role in the era of great-power competition, Brooks said.

“Coming from the 75th Ranger

Regiment, I’ve watched that unit evolve rapidly over the past two decades from a more conventional style airfield seizure unit to a modern, urban warfare, counterterrorism group,” Brooks said. “The investment in the [special operations] community has ... expanded.”

For Brooks, the decision to write his book was a deeply personal one. For the special operators involved in the rescue and recovery mission of Turbine 33, telling their story was empowering, Brooks said.

Turbine 33 was the quick-reaction force that was on its way to rescue a compromised Navy SEAL reconnaissance team in northeastern Afghanistan in 2005. Turbine 33—an MH-47 Chinook carrying eight SEALs and eight soldiers from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment—was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, leading commanders to call in the 75th Ranger Regiment for the search and recovery mission.

“Special operators, in general, we don’t ... like telling our stories, so getting all of my friends and colleagues to be OK with me telling our story was a challenge,” he said. “Our story had never been told correctly. Someone had to tell the story from our perspective.”

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Medal of Honor*From Page 1*

ley multiple times to rescue soldiers trapped inside, according to the citation.

“As we were fighting the fight and clearing the scene, he wouldn’t leave,” said Col. Jimmy Hathaway, who was Cashe’s company commander, according to an Army news article. “He wanted to make sure all of his guys were out first even though he was burned over most of his body. He was still more concerned about his guys getting out than he was.”

Cashe died Nov. 8, 2005, at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. He was 35.

While Cashe was quickly awarded the Silver Star, there has been a long campaign to have his award upgraded after the extent of his actions became known.

Cashe’s widow, Tamara, will accept the Medal of Honor on his behalf.

Christopher Celiz

Celiz was an Army Ranger assigned to the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, when he was killed by small-arms enemy fire during a combat operation July 12, 2018, in Paktia province, Afghanistan, according to the Army.

A veteran of at least five combat deployments with 1st Battalion, Celiz was leading an operation to clear an area of enemy forces, according to the White House. Under “intense enemy machine gun and small arms fire,” Celiz moved to secure a heavy weapon system, allowing his team to regain the initiative and move to a secure location to treat a critically wounded partnered force member, the White House said.

As the medical evacuation helicopter arrived, it immediately came under heavy and sustained enemy fire. Celiz willingly exposed himself to the withering fire and used his body as a shield while a team of soldiers carried the wounded man to the helicopter, according to the White House.

He put himself between the cockpit



A banner with a photograph of Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe hangs between two Bradley Fighting Vehicles as part of a static display during the dedication ceremony for Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn C. Cashe Garden on Fort Stewart, Georgia. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

and the enemy, ensuring the aircraft was able to lift off, the White House said. As the helicopter took off, Celiz was hit by enemy fire.

“Fully aware of his own injury but understanding the peril to the aircraft from the intense enemy machine gun fire, Sergeant First Class Celiz motioned to the aircraft to depart rather than remain to load him,” the White House said.

Celiz was known for his selfless attitude on and off the battlefield, according to the Army.

“He didn’t feel like he could do his job without his soldiers ready and able by his side,” his widow, Katie, said, according to the Army. “He always pushed them, and he wanted them to push him.”

Earl Plumlee

Plumlee received the Silver Star for his actions on Aug. 28, 2013, when a nearly 2,000-pound truck bomb exploded at Forward Operating Base Ghazni in Afghanistan. When the smoke cleared, insurgents dressed as Afghan soldiers and wearing suicide vest swarmed the base through the 60-foot breach in the perimeter wall, according to the White House and an Army news article.

Plumlee, a weapons sergeant with the 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group, and five of his fellow soldiers

quickly commandeered two trucks to race to the site of the blast, according to the White House.

Coming face-to-face with an insurgent, Plumlee leapt from his truck and began firing at the enemy with his pistol, according to the White House and the Army news article. “Without cover and with complete disregard for his own safety, he advanced on the superior enemy force engaging multiple insurgents with only his pistol,” the White House said.

When a fellow American soldier was mortally wounded by a suicide vest, Plumlee ran to carry him to safety and began treating his wounds, applying multiple tourniquets before directing two others to help evacuate the soldier, according to the White House and the Army.

“It was a crazy day,” Plumlee said, according to an Army news article. “It doesn’t make any sense. How I didn’t get shot, I don’t know. My best guess was because I kept moving. [The insurgents] were always one or two feet behind me.”

He downplayed his actions on that day, saying instead that the medal should be awarded to the group.

“I’m not used to being singled out for anything positive or negative,” he said, according to the Army. “Generally, the team you’re involved in gets those kinds of accolades.”

AUSA leaders attend fundraiser supporting military families

By Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey,
U.S. Army retired

On Dec. 4, the Association of the U.S. Army's NCO and Soldier Programs team had the honor of attending the annual Gingerbread Ball hosted by the association's Monmouth chapter in New Jersey.

The event raised more than \$70,000 for the Fisher House Foundation, which for the past 30 years has provided "a home away from home" for families of patients receiving medical care at major military and VA medical centers.

A military household name today, the Fisher House Foundation was started in 1990 by Zachary Fisher and his wife, Elizabeth, and the Gingerbread Ball has raised money for the foundation for the better part of 20 years.

Today there are 91 Fisher Houses in the U.S., Germany and the U.K.

This year, the chapter teamed up with the Association of Old Crows, the Army Aviation Association of America, local chapters of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association, local businesses, community partners and concerned citizens to host the ball.

"I do believe the night was a great



AUSA's Monmouth chapter presents a check to the Fisher House Foundation, which supports families of military patients receiving medical care. (AUSA PHOTO)

success," said Ed Thomas, the Monmouth chapter president.

Held at the seaside Ocean Place Resort and Spa in Long Branch, New Jersey, this year's event was organized by the Monmouth chapter ball committee, chaired by Kit Roache.

It was truly a fun-filled evening for all who participated. Guests included AUSA members from national headquarters and several fellow chapters, business and community officials from central and coastal New Jersey, and soldiers from local Army recruiting companies and New Jersey National Guard and Army Reserve units.

The evening began with a VIP reception, a silent auction to benefit the foundation, and an awards presentation to recognize the contributions of chapter partners. The decorating committee should be commended for its efforts.

The main event, which included dinner and entertainment, was hosted by Fox News host and former Army National Guard officer Pete Hegseth, and remarks were delivered by former Staff Sgt. David Bellavia.

Bellavia, who is the only living Medal of Honor recipient from the Iraq War, delivered an awe-inspiring speech that made me want to reenlist.

It was an incredible evening that all who were in attendance would be hard pressed to forget, and the "icing on the gingerbread house" was the money raised for the Fisher House Foundation.

This year's donation brought the Monmouth chapter's total contributions to date to more than \$2.5 million, an incredible gift that has gone a long way to help the families and loved ones of those who have served feel at home.

Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey is AUSA's vice president for NCO and Soldier Programs and was the 15th sergeant major of the Army.



Former Staff Sgt. David Bellavia, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions in Iraq, speaks during the Gingerbread Ball hosted by AUSA's Monmouth chapter. (AUSA PHOTO)

AUSA donation assists military families during water crisis

The Association of the U.S. Army’s Pacific Region recently donated \$10,000 in support of service members and their families affected by the water contamination crisis in Hawaii.

“The Pacific Region of AUSA is proud to support the service members and families affected by the water crisis here on the island of Oahu,” said retired Col. Benjamin Lukefahr, the region president.

Pacific Region

AUSA’s Pacific Region includes Alaska, Hawaii, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, Oceania and Armed Forces Pacific.

More than 1,600 families have been affected, and many have been displaced to contracted hotels at no expense, Lukefahr said. Those who have decided to remain in their homes have been provided with bottled water, bulk water and laundry and shower support.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he is “receiving daily updates



Residents of the Aliamanu Military Reservation wait in line for lunch provided by the 569th Field Feeding Company, 25th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion, on the Aliamanu Military Reservation, Hawaii. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. 1ST CLASS RICHARD LOWER)

... about fresh water contamination near the strategically important Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam—contamination that has directly affected thousands of military members and their families.”

The precise cause of the contami-

nation is under investigation by the Navy, Austin said in a statement.

“Nothing is more important to me or to this Department than the health, safety and well-being of our people and their families, as well as that of residents living near our installations,” he said.

Eagle Chapters

The following chapters attained Eagle status for November by showing positive membership growth. The number of consecutive months of growth since July 1, 2021, is shown in parentheses.

- Arizona Territorial (5)
- Braxton Bragg (5)
- Central California (4)
- First In Battle (4)
- GEN William C. Westmoreland (4)
- Hellenic (4)
- MG John S. Lekson (4)
- Mid-Palatinat (4)
- Tri-State (4)
- A.P. Hill Rappahannock (3)
- Central Ohio (3)
- GEN Creighton W. Abrams (3)
- Japan (3)

- Las Vegas-John C. Fremont (3)
- Marne (3)
- New Orleans (3)
- North Texas (3)
- Pikes Peak (3)
- Space Coast (3)
- Suncoast (3)
- Arkansas (2)
- Cowboy (2)
- First Militia (2)
- Greater Kansas City (2)
- San Diego (2)
- Thunderbird (2)



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