



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 21, 2010

## First Living Medal of Honor Recipient Since Vietnam

The White House has announced that a 25-year-old soldier who braved enemy fire to rescue two comrades during a 2007 military operation in Afghanistan will become the first living American serviceman since the Vietnam War to receive the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award.

Army Staff Sergeant Salvatore Giunta, of Iowa, will be the eighth soldier to receive the Medal of Honor since the U.S. began its most recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, but will be the first living soldier since the Vietnam War to receive the honor, which is awarded "for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty."



On October 25, 2007, while on an operation in the Korengal Valley of Afghanistan, a rifle team led by Giunta was split into two groups by an enemy ambush. According to a White House press release, Giunta exposed himself to enemy fire to pull one fellow soldier to safety, and then attacked enemy forces again as he saw two hostiles dragging another soldier, 22-year-old Sergeant Joshua Brennan, into a nearby woods. After killing one of the enemy and wounding another, Giunta tended to the wounded Brennan, who died the next day.

"His courage and leadership while under extreme enemy fire were integral to his platoon's ability to defeat an enemy ambush and recover a fellow American soldier from enemy hands," the White House said of Giunta's heroic actions.

Giunta was in his second tour of duty in Afghanistan when the ambush occurred, and had previously received both a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for his actions in battle. Giunta's father told the Associated Press (AP) that while his son, who enlisted in the Army shortly after high school, is deeply honored to receive the Medal, he is also very humbled. "He mentions every other soldier would have done the same thing," said Steven Giunta. "It kind of rocks his world that he's being awarded the Medal of Honor for something each and every one of them would have done. He's very aware of that."

In addition to Giunta, the White House announced that two other service personnel will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously. On October 6, President Obama will present the nation's highest military award to the parents of Army Staff Sergeant Robert Miller, a Special Forces member, for his courage in sacrificing his life to save a group of fellow Green Berets and Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers.

According to an Army press release, while serving as a Special Forces weapons sergeant in Afghanistan, on January 25, 2008, Miller volunteered to lead a night patrol near the Pakistan border. When his team came under fire by insurgents, "Miller deliberately moved forward making himself vulnerable as he engaged several enemy positions to provide suppressive fire, buying time for his teammates to take cover," the press release related. "Exposing his position repeatedly, he drew fire



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from more than 100 enemy fighters, ultimately saving the lives of his fellow Green Berets and 15 local ANA soldiers.”

Also scheduled to receive the Medal of Honor on September 21, 42 years after dying in Laos, was Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Richard Etchberger, who was killed after he had defended a clandestine U.S. radar site in the mountains of Laos, and saved the lives of several crew members. According to an Air Force news release, “Despite having received little or no combat training, Etchberger single-handedly held off the enemy with an M-16 rifle while simultaneously directing air strikes into the area and calling for air rescue. Because of his fierce defense and heroic and selfless actions, he was able to deny the enemy access to his position and save the lives of some of his crew.”

After rescue aircraft arrived at the installation to extract the trapped personnel, Etchberger exposed himself to fire, placing three surviving wounded comrades into rescue slings hanging from a helicopter. “With his remaining crew safely aboard,” related the news release, “Etchberger finally climbed into an evacuation sling himself, only to be fatally wounded by enemy ground fire as he was being raised into the aircraft.”

While Etchberger’s heroic actions were unknown even to his family members until years after his death, following a 2008 review of his actions, Air Force Secretary Michael Donley nominated the Pennsylvania native for the Medal of Honor. President Barack Obama approved the recommendation, and Etchberger’s medal was to be presented to members of his family at a White House ceremony, after which he was to be inducted into the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes.

*Photo: Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta, the first living Medal of Honor recipient since the Vietnam War: AP Images*



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