



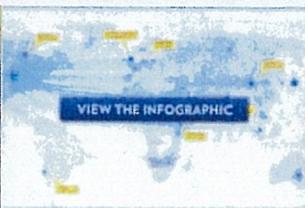
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## President Obama Awards Medal of Honor to Dakota Meyer



Colleen Curtis  
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President Barack Obama awards the Medal of Honor to Dakota Meyer during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, Sept. 15, 2011. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

President Obama today awarded the Medal of Honor to Dakota Meyer, a former active duty Marine Corps Corporal from Kentucky. Sergeant Meyer was recognized for his courageous actions at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on September 8, 2009. He is the third living recipient - and the first Marine - to be awarded the Medal of Honor for actions in Iraq or Afghanistan. And at 23, he is also one of the youngest recipients in decades.

The President, who first met Meyer when they shared a beer at the White House on Wednesday evening, said that, "in Sergeant Dakota Meyer, we see the best of a generation that has served through a decade of war."

Meyer saved 36 lives during a Taliban ambush in repeated acts of bravery, tales of which the President noted, "will be told for generations."

I want you to imagine it's September 8, 2009, just before dawn. A patrol

Veterans

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of Afghan forces and their American trainers is on foot, making their way up a narrow valley, heading into a village to meet with elders. And suddenly, all over the village, the lights go out. And that's when it happens. About a mile away, Dakota, who was then a corporal, and Staff Sergeant Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, could hear the ambush over the radio. It was as if the whole valley was exploding. Taliban fighters were unleashing a firestorm from the hills, from the stone houses, even from the local school.

And soon, the patrol was pinned down, taking ferocious fire from three sides. Men were being wounded and killed, and four Americans -- Dakota's friends -- were surrounded. Four times, Dakota and Juan asked permission to go in; four times they were denied. It was, they were told, too dangerous. But one of the teachers in his high school once said, "When you tell Dakota he can't do something, he's is going to do it." And as Dakota said of his trapped teammates, "Those were my brothers, and I couldn't just sit back and watch."

The story of what Dakota did next will be told for generations. He told Juan they were going in. Juan jumped into a Humvee and took the wheel; Dakota climbed into the turret and manned the gun. They were defying orders, but they were doing what they thought was right. So they drove straight into a killing zone, Dakota's upper body and head exposed to a blizzard of fire from AK-47s and machine guns, from mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.

Coming upon wounded Afghan soldiers, Dakota jumped out and loaded each of the wounded into the Humvee, each time exposing himself to all that enemy fire. They turned around and drove those wounded back to safety. Those who were there called it the most intense combat they'd ever seen. Dakota and Juan would have been forgiven for not going back in. But as Dakota says, you don't leave anyone behind.

For a second time, they went back -- back into the inferno; Juan at the wheel, swerving to avoid the explosions all around them; Dakota up in the turret -- when one gun jammed, grabbing another; going through gun after gun. Again they came across wounded Afghans. Again Dakota jumped out, loaded them up and brought them back to safety.

For a third time, they went back -- insurgents running right up to the Humvee, Dakota fighting them off. Up ahead, a group of Americans, some wounded, were desperately trying to escape the bullets raining down. Juan wedged the Humvee right into the line of fire, using the vehicle as a shield. With Dakota on the guns, they helped those Americans back to safety as well.

For a fourth time, they went back. Dakota was now wounded in the arm. Their vehicle was riddled with bullets and shrapnel. Dakota later confessed, "I didn't think I was going to die. I knew I was." But still they pushed on, finding the wounded, delivering them to safety.

And then, for a fifth time, they went back -- into the fury of that village, under fire that seemed to come from every window, every doorway, every alley. And when they finally got to those trapped Americans, Dakota jumped out. And he ran toward them. Drawing all those enemy guns on himself. Bullets kicking up the dirt all around him. He kept going until he came upon those four Americans, laying where they fell, together as one team.

Dakota and the others who had joined him knelt down, picked up their comrades and -- through all those bullets, all the smoke, all the chaos -- carried them out, one by one. Because, as Dakota says, "That's what you do for a brother."

Dakota says he'll accept this medal in their name. So today, we remember the husband who loved the outdoors -- Lieutenant Michael Johnson. The husband and father they called "Gunny J" -- Gunnery Sergeant Edwin Johnson. The determined Marine who fought to get on that team -- Staff Sergeant Aaron Kenefick. The medic who gave his life tending to his teammates -- Hospitalman Third Class James Layton. And a soldier wounded in that battle who never recovered -- Sergeant First

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- Live Streams
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- Your Weekly Address
- Speeches & Remarks
- Press Briefings
- Statements & Releases
- White House Schedule
- Presidential Actions
- Legislation
- Nominations & Appointments
- Disclosures

#### Issues

- Civil Rights
- Defense
- Disabilities
- Economy
- Education
- Energy & Environment
- Ethics
- Family
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Foreign Policy
- Health Care
- Homeland Security
- Immigration
- Poverty
- Rural
- Seniors & Social Security
- Service
- Taxes
- Technology
- Urban Policy
- Veterans
- Women
- Additional Issues

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- Vice President Joe Biden
- First Lady Michelle Obama
- Dr. Jill Biden
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- White House Staff
- Executive Office of the President
- Other Advisory Boards

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- History
- Presidents
- First Ladies
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- The Vice President's Residence & Office
- Eisenhower Executive Office Building
- Camp David
- Air Force One
- White House Fellows
- White House Internships
- Tours & Events
- Inside the White House

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- The Executive Branch
- The Legislative Branch
- The Judicial Branch
- The Constitution
- Federal Agencies & Commissions
- Elections & Voting
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