



CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR FOUNDATION



Justice Delayed –

Near Chi Lang, South Vietnam, 1969

Melvin Morris was a nineteen-year old army artillery man in 1961 when he went to Airborne School, and, after graduating, heard about the Special Forces. The rumors about how they were “snake eaters” and “shadow warriors” intrigued him, and he decided that surviving the rigorous training would allow a man “to stick out his chest and hold his head high.” So he volunteered.

Earning the green beret was another rung on the ladder Morris built for himself to escape the rough times of his youth. Born in Okmulgee, Oklahoma in 1942, Morris grew up in the recessions of the 1950a— which hit African Americans particularly hard. His father, a carpenter, was frequently out of work. Morris often lived with his grandparents on their farm because they always had enough to eat. He joined the military at seventeen because “being a soldier was better than being in trouble.”

After serving in the Oklahoma National Guard for a year, Morris went on active duty. When he received his first monthly paycheck of \$61, he was amazed: “I had never seen that kind of money.” He had completed airborne training when President John F. Kennedy came to Fort Bragg in October 1961 to review the Green Berets, a visit that added to the elite unit’s mystique. Morris, who until then had heard only vague rumors of the Special Forces, decided to become a Green Beret himself. Graduating from training in 1963, he volunteered for Vietnam, but was held back because of an injury and didn’t get there until late 1968.

On September 17, 1969, Staff Sergeant Morris was in command of a five-man Special Forces team supporting South Vietnamese troops near Chi Lang when they discovered a large cache of food and weapons the enemy had smuggled over the Cambodian border. After a number of North Vietnamese troops defending the cache opened fire, Morris learned by radio that a sergeant commanding another Special Forces team closer to the action had been killed near an enemy bunker. He immediately moved his men forward and, with two volunteers, went through a minefield to recover the body.

Upon reaching the fallen American, Morris had time to say a quick prayer over him before all hell broke loose. The two men with him were immediately wounded. With enemy bullets snapping around his head, Morris assisted them back to a defensive position. He grabbed twenty

... continued on next page

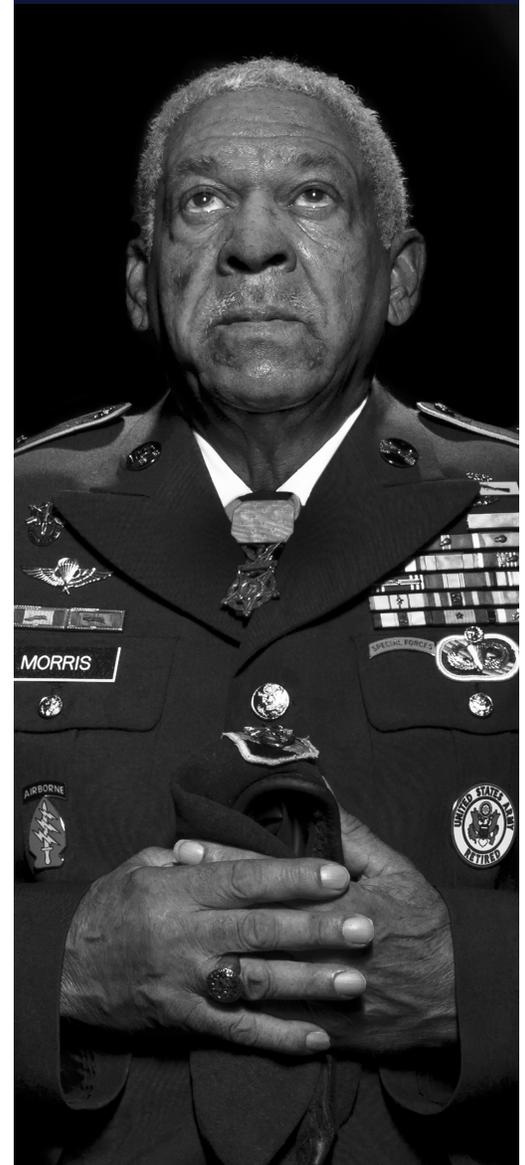
MELVIN MORRIS

Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army Company D, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces

BORN: January 7, 1942
Okmulgee, Oklahoma

ENTERED SERVICE:
Fort Bragg, North Carolina

DUTY: Vietnam War





CONGRESSIONAL
MEDAL OF HONOR
FOUNDATION



grenades and ran back into the withering fire, destroying four enemy bunkers with grenades. Recovering the Green Beret's body and then returning for a map case containing classified information, he was hit three times in his chest and right arm. He managed to take refuge behind a tree, where he was pinned down for over two hours. He radioed for help and the Navy sent a light helicopter to drop explosives, creating an opening for Morris to return to this team.

He didn't get to a field hospital until two days later. After a week, he was flown to Japan, where he was hospitalized for three months before returning to the United States. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award in the U.S. military's "pyramid of honor," in April 1970.

In the spring of 2013, Melvin Morris was contacted by the Pentagon, advising him to be on the alert for a call from a "senior government official." When the call came a few days later, it was from President Barack Obama. He informed Morris that a lengthy review of recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam had determined that he should have received the Medal of Honor. The President apologized as he put the medal around Morris's neck on March 18, 2014, in a ceremony at the White House.