Each year, recipients of the nation’s highest military award for valor arrive in Gainesville the first week of April for the Medal of Honor Host City Program and, this year, more are expected than ever before.

“This is a record year for recipients,” said Tommy Moore, president of the Medal of Honor Host City Board of Directors.

A total of 21 recipients — Bennie Adkins, John Baca, Don “Doo” Bledsoe, Gary Buck, Paul Butcher, Michael John Finnane, Robert Ingram, Charles Kettles, Walter Joe Marm, Jim McCrilligan, Hiroshi Miyamura, Robert Modrzejewski, Melvin Morris, Robert Patterson, Gary Rose, Ronald E. Romero, Kenneth Slayton, James Taylor, Mike Thornton, Gary Wetzel and Hershel “Woody” Williams — are scheduled to be present at various events throughout the week.

By MEGAN GRAY-HATFIELD
Staff Writer
mgray-hatfield@gainesvilleregister.com

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Medal of Honor Host City

HEROES continued from page 1B

events hosted throughout the city, April 4 through April 7. Rosser, Bucha, Kettles, McCloughan and Rose will be visiting Gainesville for the first time, Moore said.

Previously, the highest number of recipients to visit was 19 in 2014. Moore said the program has also started bringing widows of recipients back to Gainesville and that’s something board members are really proud of. The widows are personally invited and are taken care of during their stay.

“What happens is once their husbands pass, the society quite commonly stops communicating with them,” Moore said. “They spend like 40, 50, 60 years of their lives with this being their second family, and then, all of a sudden they are just dropped like a hot potato.”

Moore said he believes last year was the first time for family members who were not with their spouses to attend.

“It’s been touching to see these women have their voice back and their family back,” he said.

The Medal of Honor Host City Program was established in 2001 to provide residents with a more interactive connection with America’s history, the military and the veteran community, according to the organization’s website. Gainesville is the only Medal of Honor Host City in the U.S.
Medical of Honor

recipient stories

Bennie Adkins
U.S. Army

Sgt. First Class Bennie Adkins, a native of Waurika, Oklahoma, received his Medal of Honor from President Obama on Sept. 15, 2014. His exploits, so numerous and heroic in the jungles of Vietnam earned President Obama to exclaim, “There would not be enough time to describe them all.”

The following enlisted transcript of the ceremonial citation details a portion of Adkins’ incredible story.

In the presentation to Adkins, the president related the events of March 9, 1966, when Adkins was attacked by a large North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force in the early morning hours.

“In the presentation to Adkins, the president related the events of March 9, 1966, when Adkins was attacked by a large North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force in the early morning hours.

“Sergeant First Class Adkins rushed through intense enemy fire and manned a mortar position continuously adjusting fire for the camp, despite numerous wounds as the mortar received several direct hits from enemy mortars.”

“During a 38 hour battle and hours of escape and evasion waiting for a second evacuation helicopter, fighting with mortars, machine guns, recoilless rifles, small arms and hand grenades, it was estimated Adkins killed up to 175 of the enemy while maintaining all of his front line wounds to his body.”

John P. Baca
U.S. Army/Vietnam

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sp4c. Baca, Company D, distinguished himself by his personal valor and selflessness displayed by Sp4c. Baca, at the risk of his life, are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Don “Doc” Ballard
U.S. Navy/Vietnam

On May 16, 1968, having just returned from evacuation, Ballard was sent to investigate the detonation of an automatic ambush device forward of his unit’s main position and near concealed enemy fire from concealed positions along the trail. Hearing the heavy firing from the platoon positions and realizing that his recoilless rifle team could assist the members of the besieged patrol, Sp4c. Baca led his team through the hail of enemy fire to a firing position within the patrol’s defensive perimeter.

As their platoon moved forward, they engaged the enemy, a fragmentation grenade was thrown into the midst of the patrol. Fully aware of the danger to his comrades, Sp4c. Baca unhesitatingly, and with complete disregard for his own safety, covered the grenade with his steel helmet and fell on it as the grenade exploded, thereby absorbing the lethal fragments and concussion on his body. His gallantry and heroism displayed by Sp4c. Baca, at the risk of his life, are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

Gary Beikirch
U.S. Army/Vietnam

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. As they prepared to engage a firing position within the patrol’s defensive perimeter. Sp4c. Baca led his team through the hail of enemy fire to a firing position within the patrol’s defensive perimeter.

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President Obama said Ballard’s first thought as he saw it hit nearby was that it would kill the men he was treating; it exploded. With no thought for his own safety, Ballard forced himself on the grenade and crushed it against his body.

Seconds passed. The grenade failed to immediately detonate and Ballard was able to throw it out of the hole, it exploded harmlessly a few seconds later. Ballard calmly continued to treat the wounded. Ballard eventually left the Navy and later received a commission in the Army Medical Corps. He retired at the rank of colonel.

We Salute Our Heroes

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”Motto led an offensive across enemy lines to retrieve a fallen comrade. He single-handedly destroyed an enemy force who had pinned his battalion down as a series of bunkers. Motto was shot three times running back to the “American lines with bullets and fire all around until he reached safety.”

Staff Sergeant Motto, 25 years old, was one of our nation’s very first Green Berets.” — President Obama

"I am one of our very first Green Berets, think about that. I think that’s legendary."

Paul Bucha
U.S. Army/Vietnam

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Bucha distinguished himself while serving as commander, Company D, on a reconnaissance-in-force mission against enemy forces near Phu Yen, South Vietnam. The company was inserted by helicopter into the suspected enemy stronghold to locate and destroy the enemy. During this period Capt. Bucha aggressively and courageously led his men in the destruction of enemy fortifications and base areas and eliminated scattered resistance impeding the advance of the company. On 18 March while advancing to contact, the lead elements of the company became engaged by heavy automatic weapon, heavy machine gun, rocket propelled grenade, Claymore estimated battalion-size force. Capt. Bucha, with complete disregard for his safety, moved to the threatened area to direct the defense and ordered rein-

Staff Sergeant Morris, 27 years old, was one of our Berets, “President Obama said. “I mean one of our very best. That’s legendary.”

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Gainesville Daily Register

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Bucha, by his extraordinary heroism, inspirational leadership and professional compe-

Michael Fitzmaurice
U.S. Army/Vietnam

Born in Jamestown, New York, on March 9, 1950, Specialist Fourth Class Michael J. Fitzmaurice received the Medal of Honor on Nov. 15, 2010, for valorous actions on Mar 21, 1971.

According to the citation, Fitzmaurice distinguished himself at Khe Sanh. The Americans and their allies soldiers were occupying a bunker when a company of North Vietnamese napalm their position.

At the onset of the attack...
Robert Ingram, U.S. Marine Corps, Warrant Officer

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a gunner and severely damaged by a mortar round that shattered both front windshields of his helicopter. Without hesitation, Robert Ingram immediately washed and bandaged his wounds and returned to the attack zone to rescue the remaining troops. Despite the intense enemy fire, Robert Ingram's selfless acts of repeated valor and determination are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army.

Charles Kettles, U.S. Army, Lieutenant Colonel

On 15 May 2007, Major Kettles, a Black Hawk helicopter pilot, was called to rescue a Marine platoon on the southern edge of Fallujah, Iraq. En route, his aircraft was attacked by enemy fighters, and a reload attempt failed. As the fuel ran out, the aircraft spiraled down, leading to a tragedy.

Major Kettles, after taking control of the aircraft, guided it back to the landing zone to rescue the remaining troops. Without hesitation, he refused to depart until all his Marines were accounted for. Army gunships were loaded to depart, but again he heard the call of duty while serving as an infantry officer and had dedicated himself to the valorous service of his country, and the memory of his fellow soldiers.

Fitzmaurice observed three rounds of explosive charges which had been thrown into the bunker. He then threw his gear for his personal safety, he amassed danger to his comrades by the enemy. Realizing the imminent danger to his comrades, he immediately evacuated, preferring to save the lives of a number of his fellow soldiers.

By this courageous act he absorbed the blast and shielded his Marines from his many wounds and displayed great valor and intrepidity at the risk of his life. For his actions, Robert Ingram was awarded the Medal of Honor.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a gunner and severely damaged by a mortar round that shattered both front windshields of his helicopter. Without hesitation, Robert Ingram immediately washed and bandaged his wounds and returned to the attack zone to rescue the remaining troops. Despite the intense enemy fire, Robert Ingram's selfless acts of repeated valor and determination are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army.

Major Kettles, upon learning that eight troops were stranded when their helicopter was destroyed by enemy fire, he refused to depart until all his Marines were accounted for. Army gunships were loaded to depart, but again he heard the call of duty while serving as an infantry officer and had dedicated himself to the valorous service of his country, and the memory of his fellow soldiers.

On 28 March 1966, Petty Officer Ingram accompanied the point group of the 161st Aviation Company and returned to the deadly landing zone to rescue the remaining troops. Without hesitation, he refused to depart until all his Marines were accounted for. Army gunships were loaded to depart, but again he heard the call of duty while serving as an infantry officer and had dedicated himself to the valorous service of his country, and the memory of his fellow soldiers.

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As Alpha Company, 703 Air Cavalry, landed in the Dragon Valley in May 1968, young Mami had been in the country only two months. It was Alpha Company's second time on fire.

Young men had lied to retrieve the remains of his father and uncles, so the medal was born by an item from the war.

Attacking over 100 feet of enemy with good radios and his rifle, Mami remained in the valley for days, firing at the enemy.

In 1980, Mami returned to Vietnam at his request.

“I feel like I should pull my share of the hard work,” he said. “I mean one just has the sample and do the best I could.”

Shima says it’s always on.

I wear the medal for all those brave men who were in that valley. This is my medal, my life, my war, my battle. I wear the medal for all those who were there and all those who were brave.

Melvin Morris
U.S. Army/Vietnam

On a period of three days, Captain Miyamura and his men fought all day against a regiment-size enemy Vietnamese concentration.

Wounded by the explosion, he ran and crawled 269 yards to retrieve ammunition and deliver it to vulnerable troops. He later died in a military hospital.

His medal was presented to him by President Ronald Reagan in October 1981 at the White House.

Robert Modrzejewski
U.S. Marine Corps/Vietnam

Mami was born in Gally, New Mexico to Japanese immigrant parents.

On April 13, 1968, Mami realized his dream of fighting for his country.

Mami was killed in action in the Dragon Valley.

He volunteered to be part of the all-Nisei 100th Infantry Battalion. This army unit was mostly made up of Japanese Americans from Hawaii and the mainland.

He was discharged from the service.

Following the war, he lived in the United States and worked at John Deere. He died on February 25, 2018.

Melvin Morris, Staff Sergeant US. Army, Vietnam received the MOH for valorous actions on September 17, 1965. Morris was shot three times back and forth in a “botched” attack on a company in the My Chanh area.

*Source: Constitution of the United States*
Welcome Medal of Honor Recipients!

Robert M. Patterson
U.S. Army/Vietnam

Stole Patterson woke up in a
hand-cuff with no memory of how he got there. After he enlisted in the Army, Robert M. Patterson was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg in his native North Carolina. In late 1966, a few months before his 20th birthday, he was transferred to the 101st Airborne and sent to Vietnam. The month later his platoon was ordered to encircle what they took to be a small force of Vietcong near the farming region of the La Chua District.

However, what they found instead was a battle-hardened force of North Vietnamese Army regulars — and they were suddenly outnumbered by more than two-to-one.

In the ensuing firefight, Patterson’s squad was cut off from the rest of the platoon by a complex of enemy bunkers and numerically superior forces. For four hours, the platoon was ordered to encircle what they thought was a small force of Vietcong near the farming region of the La Chua District.

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For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Sgt. Kenneth Stumpf distinguished himself while serving as a squad leader of the 3d Platoon, Company L, 38th Infantry Regiment, was engaged by enemy automatic weapons, small-arms artillery, and mortar fire. Sgt. Stumpf, a forward observer was located on the right flank of Company L, when it came under fire from 2 direct enemy fire. Sgt. Stumpf moved to his right in his attempt to take cover and direct enemy fire. He then hurled his grenade into the bunker, he threw a handgrenade through the aperture. It was immediately returned by the occupants, forcing Sgt. Stumpf to take cover. Undaunted, he pulled the pin on more grenades, held them for a few seconds after activating, then hurled them into the position, this time successfully destroying the emplacement. With the elimination of this key position, his unit was able to assault and overcome the enemy. Sgt. Stumpf's valiant spirit of aggressiveness, intrepidity and ultimate concern for duty is worthy of emulation by all men. He has contributed magnificently to the high traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

Kenneth Stumpf
U.S. Army/Vietnam

Jim Taylor
U.S. Army/Vietnam

One of Taylor's armored cavalry assault vehicle was hit immediately by recoilless rifle fire and 2 of his crew members were wounded. Taylor moved forward and personally removed all the wounded men and, valiantly established a hand grenade fire zone for medical evacuation. Then, aggressively responding to enemy machine gun fire to the south, Capt. Taylor engaged the position with his machine gun, killing the enemy crew.

Once again, Capt. Taylor rushed forward and pulled another wounded from the vehicle, loaded them aboard his vehicle, and returned them safely to the evacuation site.

Gainesville Daily

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Michael Thornton
U.S. Navy/Vietnam

Petty Officer Michael Thornton, as Assistant U.S. Navy Advisor along with a U.S. Navy warrant officer, accompanied a three-man Vietnamese Marine/NVA patrol on an intelligence gathering and prisoner captivity mission against an enemy occupied rural rice field base.

Launched from a Vietnamese Navy patrol in a rubber boot at 0730, the patrol reached land and was continuing to move toward its objective when it suddenly came under heavy fire. Thornton was a good 100 feet from the patrol. He took a naval gunfire support and then engaged the enemy in a fierce firefight, accounting for many enemy casualties before moving back to the waterline to prevent encirclement. Upon learning that the senior advisor had been hit by enemy fire and was believed to be dead, Thornton managed through a hail of fire to the lieuten-ant’s last position; quickly and safely, he came to the side of the chief even though he lost con-sciousness once again during this action. Sp4c. Wetzel displayed extraordinary heroism in his efforts to aid his fellow crewmen. His gallant actions were in keeping with the high- est traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Sp4c. Wetzel was going to the aid of his aircraft com-mander when he was hit by a round of intense and deadly hostile force trapped in a landing zone which was part of an insertion operation against an enemy-occupied rural rice field base.

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Sp4c. Wetzel remained at his original position in his gun-crew chief who was attempting to drag the wounded aircraft commander to the safety of a nearby ditch. Unsuccessful in his devotion to his fellow man, Sp4c. Wetzel assisted his crew chief even though he lost con-sciousness once again during this action. Sp4c. Wetzel dis-played extraordinary heroism in his efforts to aid his fellow crewmen. His gallant actions were in keeping with the high- est traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.
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AND

JOE B. WALTER
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