



Medal of Honor Recipient Inducted Into Pentagon's Hall of Heroes

By John J. Kruzel
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 4, 2008 – The Defense Department posthumously inducted Army Master Sgt. Woodrow Keeble today into its Hall of Heroes, a day after President Bush bestowed the Medal of Honor on the Korean War hero.

Keeble is the first full-blooded Sioux Indian to receive the nation's highest military award. Almost six decades after the gallant actions that earned him the nation's highest military award, and 26 years after his death, his relatives unveiled his name during a ceremony here at the Pentagon. He joins 131 other veterans to receive the Medal of Honor for combat valor in the Korean War.

Keeble risked his life to save fellow soldiers in 1951 during the final allied offensive in Korea. He was recommended for the medal by every surviving member of his unit at the time, but "administrative errors" and "bureaucratic processes" delayed the honor, said Gen. Richard A. Cody, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff, who praised Bush for "setting the record straight."

"Over 300 million Americans are free today because ... (Keeble) fought bravely with honor and humility to defend this country and his fellow citizens," Cody told the audience gathered here for the ceremony. "The personal courage and selfless service of Master Sgt. Keeble lives on in the soldiers that have succeeded him."

Calling it an honor to salute the master sergeant, to whom he affectionately referred as "Woody," Cody held his straightened right hand to his brow in a sign of deference to Keeble, a veteran of both World War II and the Korean War.



Left to right: Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England, Russell Hawkins, Kurt Bluedog, Army Secretary Pete Geren, and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Richard Cody stand by during a Pentagon unveiling of a Medal of Honor awarded to the late Master Sgt. Woodrow Keeble, the first full-blooded Sioux Indian, for his heroism during the Korean War, March 4, 2008. Hawkins is Keeble's stepson and Bluedog is his nephew. Defense Dept. photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Molly A. Burgess (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

When war broke out in Korea, Keeble was a 34-year-old master sergeant serving with the 24th Infantry Division's 1st Platoon, Company G, 19th Infantry Regiment. He'd joined the North Dakota National Guard in 1942 and already had earned the first of his four Purple Hearts and his first Bronze Star for actions on Guadalcanal. Keeble volunteered to go to Korea, saying that "somebody has to teach these young kids how to fight," Cody said.

The division was serving in central Korea in October 1951 when it was called to take a series of mountains protecting a major enemy supply in the town of Kumsong. Operation Nomad-Polar, known as the "Big Push," was the last major United Nations offensive of the war.

U.S. casualties mounted as enemy soldiers barraged them, fortified by three pillboxes containing machine guns during ferocious fighting over a six-day span. Keeble's officers had all fallen, so he continued the assault with three platoons under his leadership.

Despite extensive injuries himself, with 83 grenade fragments in his body, Keeble defied the medics and took matters into his own hands. On Oct. 20, 1951, he charged the hill solo. "Woody knew the enemy machine guns in the heavily-fortified pillboxes were the problem. He resolved, 'I'm going to take them out or die trying,'" Cody said.

Armed only with grenades and his Browning automatic rifle, he shimmied across the ridge, singlehandedly eliminating one pillbox after another as he dodged a barrage of enemy fire. Only after Keeble had taken out all three pillboxes and killed the machine gunners did he order his troops to advance and secure the hill.

Army Secretary Pete Geren said Keeble was known on the battlefield for his resolve and tenacity in the face of danger and adversity. "The safest place to be was right next to Woody," said Geren, quoting a WWII veteran who fought alongside Keeble.

Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England told the audience that Keeble's heroism and sacrifice reminds Americans of the high price of freedom.

"Woodrow Keeble showed us -- again and again on desperate battlefields from the home he loved, first in the Pacific and then in Korea -- the very best we can be," he said. "America needs its heroes, needs men like Woodrow Keeble -- we need their service, and perhaps most of all, we need their example."

(Donna Miles of American Forces Press Service and Carrie McLeRoy of the Army News Service contributed to this article.)