

News and stories

Rotary Club of Lubbock Welcomes WWII Medal of Honor Recipient

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LUBBOCK, TX (NEWS RELEASE) - The following is a news release from the Rotary Club of Lubbock:

Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hershell "Woody" Williams will join the Rotary Club of Lubbock during its weekly luncheon at the Lubbock First United Methodist Church from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday Feb. 14.

On Feb. 23, 1945, Corporal Williams (1st Battalion, 21st Marines, 3rd Marine Division) volunteered to reduce devastating machine gun fire from reinforced pillboxes on the Pacific Island of Iwo Jima. Armed with a 70 pound flamethrower and covered by four Marine riflemen, Cpl. Williams fought for more than four hours neutralizing one fortified machine gun emplacement after another.

He repeatedly returned to his own lines to retrieve serviced flamethrowers and satchel charges to continue assaulting the network of gun emplacements. Cpl. Williams faced withering small arms fire and during his assault, two of the riflemen providing cover were killed in action. Cpl. Williams, however, was spurred forward, witnessing the flag-raising atop Mt. Surabachi that day on Iwo Jima.

At times, Cpl. Williams made his way behind and on top of enemy gun emplacements, once mounting a pillbox, and firing his flamethrower through an air vent in the roof. At one point he was charged by enemy riflemen with bayonets and dispatched them with a burst of flame from his weapon. His actions helped open a lane for infantry to advance off of the volcanic beach where tanks were foundering in the sand and U.S. forces were taking heavy losses with nowhere to seek cover.

On Oct. 1, 1945, Cpl. Williams was ordered to Washington D.C., where he received the Congressional Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman for his actions at Iwo Jima.

“When I picked these four Marines to support me, I had no idea who they were. Two of those were killed that day, protecting me,” explained Cpl. Williams. “I have said over and over, many many times, that this medal I wear, I wear in their honor, not mine. So I’ve considered myself as a caretaker of the medal, not the owner of the medal.”

Cpl. Williams retired as a Chief Warrant Officer 4 after serving 17 years in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and USMC Reserves. He went on to serve the Department of Veterans Affairs for 33 years. He has twice been named a Distinguished West Virginian by the West Virginia State Legislature and has received numerous state and local honors.

In 2017, the Secretary of the Navy named Expeditionary Sea Base Ship 4 the USNS Hershel “Woody” Williams, joining Astronaut John Glenn and USMC Lt. Gen Lewis “Chesty” Puller, the namesakes of the other ships in its class. In his hometown of Fairmont, WV, the \$32 million Hershel “Woody” Williams Armed Forces Reserve Center is the only National Guard facility in the country named after a U.S. Marine.

Williams, now 93, travels the United States speaking on behalf of the Hershel Woody Williams Congressional Medal of Honor Education Foundation. His foundation speaks on behalf of Gold Star

Families, works to raise funds to erect Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments in communities across all 50 states, offers scholarships to Gold Star Children, and educates communities about Gold Star Families and the sacrifice they have endured.

At Super Bowl LII on February 4, Williams joined other Medal of Honor recipients and was honored on the field, Williams completed the coin toss for the game. After a visit in Lubbock including time with students at Frenship High School, lunch at the Rotary Club of Lubbock, and dinners and other events with service members, the community, and Gold Star Families, Williams will attend an Iwo Jima Survivors Reunion in Wichita Falls and will then attend an event at the White House.

Williams will be available to the media following the luncheon and members of the media are welcome to attend his remarks and record as desired.

Please contact Keith Patrick at 806-239-6628 for further details.