

# News and stories

## Medal of Honor recipient at RHS

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Mike James | [Daily Independent](#)

RUSSELL The historical sweep of World War II and the role Woody Williams played in it brought him to Russell High School this week to talk to social studies students.

But the 94-year-old Barboursville man didn't want military matters to overshadow what he thinks is a more important message.

"What I want them to take away is that there is no limit to what an individual can do if he is dedicated to a cause," Williams said after the applause was over and the students had filed out to their next class.

It's a case Williams is well-qualified to make, considering his credentials.

Hershel Woodrow Williams is one of 71 living Medal of Honor recipients, and his deeds during the Battle of Iwo Jima brought him not just recognition as a hero but a new life as a public figure.

"My life changed that day. I became a person I had never been before," he told students. "I'm a country boy, raised on a dairy farm. I never dreamed I would see a president, let alone stand nose to nose with him."

The president was Harry Truman, who presented him the Medal of Honor in October 1945. "This little country boy from West Virginia was called to the White House (it) absolutely scared more than you could believe," he said.

The citation that accompanied his medal said Williams repeatedly used flame throwers to kill Japanese soldiers in their pillboxes and was exposed to heavy fire from the pillboxes.

He told students he followed his marine training and that other marines had died to save him. "I'm just the caretaker for the medal. I keep it shined up for them."

Williams went to war "to protect those gifts somebody had given me. I didn't do anything to form the country and make it the free country it is. Somebody else did," he said.

"The only limits we have are those we place on ourselves," he said.

Williams was in the news most recently when he was chosen to flip to coin at the Super Bowl in January.

The U.S. Navy also recently named a ship after him, the USNS Hershel "Woody" Williams, which is a support ship for amphibious landing forces.

He presented a commemorative volume on Medal of Honor history to the school and took off his Marine Corps League cap and tried on a Russell Red Devils ball cap.

He received a standing ovation following his remarks.

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