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Memorial Day: WWII hero honors others' sacrifices in OC ceremony

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Eileen Frere | [ABC7.com](http://abc7.com)

YORBA LINDA, Calif. (KABC) -- Ask Hershel "Woody" Williams and he'll say he's just a farm boy from West Virginia.

But the 94-year-old's actions during the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945 show he was a hero.

Williams appeared on Memorial Day at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda to lay a wreath and honor those who sacrificed their lives for this country.

But Williams himself was also honored with praise for his heroism.

During the key World War II battle, American tanks were trying to open a lane for infantry, but encountered a network of reinforced concrete pill boxes.

Armed with a 70-pound flamethrower, Williams went forward alone.

"The flamethrower became an essential weapon because of the tunnels and caves and the great number of pillboxes," Williams recalled.

Covered by only four riflemen, the chief warrant officer fought for four hours while under enemy fire.

He wiped out one position after another, eventually getting close enough to a Japanese bunker to put the nozzle of the flamethrower through a hole and take out all the occupants.

That was the same day, Feb. 23, 1945, that the iconic photo was taken of U.S. Marines raising a flag during the battle.

President Harry Truman presented Williams with the Medal of Honor for valor during that battle.

Williams says he learned many lessons from war but one thing in particular stands out: "You can't quit. If you're going to win. You must continue to push on."

But this Memorial Day he doesn't wear the Medal of Honor.

This day is about those who didn't make it home.

"I don't want this to be about me. I want this to be about them."

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