

News and stories

He Earned a Medal of Honor in WWII – On Super Bowl Sunday, He'll Do What He Never Thought Possible

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Among the brave heroes who only fought harder when the odds were against them is Hershel “Woody” Williams. And the NFL plans to recognize him on Super Bowl Sunday.

Williams, 94, served in the Pacific theater during World War II. In the heat of battle, his courage would be put to the test, pushing him to go above and beyond the call of duty as a U.S. Marine. What he did on the island of Iwo Jima and the other Volcano Islands is nothing short of extraordinary.

He took it to the enemy for four hours while under constant machine-gun fire. Williams bounced back and forth from his forward position to U.S. lines for weapons and ammo, including a flamethrower he put through the air vent of a pillbox, killing everyone inside. In addition, as the enemy came barreling toward him with their bayonets in hand, he used his flamethrower to take them out.

Williams received the Medal of Honor for his bravery and courage. Now, the NFL is honoring Williams with a different kind of tribute.

He's been picked to toss the coin at Super Bowl LII.

Independent Journal Review talked to Williams about the news, and he had a lot to say.

"It's something that was never in the dream or my imagination. I never thought anything like it would happen," Williams said. "I knew we were going to the Super Bowl for a few months because about 15 of us were invited to go. It wasn't until last Thursday that we were notified that I was going to be the guy that was going to toss the coin, and it was almost unbelievable."

Funnily enough, Williams isn't into football much at all: "I'm not a big football fan. I don't watch football much. I didn't watch the Super Bowl last year."

He does have one memory about football that has stuck with him all these years, though, and it goes back to his time during World War II.

Williams said:

"When we were in a battle in World War II, you had to have a password. They were not written down. They were passwords that you had to memorize. Each night, when we were in combat, we used the passwords so that the enemy could not pass through our lines.

We had a password every night if you left a foxhole, or had to go someplace, you were challenged.

The person said, 'What's the password?' If you didn't know it, you would get shot. Passwords about automobiles I was very good with. But when they gave me baseball or football passwords, I had trouble with them because I never heard of them, I didn't know what they were."

With having the spotlight on him at the Super Bowl, we asked Williams what such a gesture from the NFL means to him.

"I feel that it's a method by which we as recipients can attend and illustrate the importance of our country, our flag, and our freedom. There are only 72 [Medal of Honor recipients] living in the United States, and to have 15 join in this ballgame has great significance for our country and our youth," Williams said. "And I hope that they continue to do this year. They may or may not. But I would hope that they would."

When asked what the process was to pick him for the coin toss, he told us he has no idea. "I hope I can find out what put me in the game to be the coin-tosser. I don't know," he said.

Williams, who flies out Friday for the Super Bowl in Minneapolis, also has a forthcoming book called "Flamethrower," which is expected to be released sometime later this year.

We wish him the best as he tosses the coin in front of millions this coming Sunday.