

Commanders Corner, September 2020

There were no September 2020 Executive Board and Post meetings due to restrictions on social gatherings related to the COVID-19 outbreak; Post and Executive Committee meetings are suspended until further notice. The South Montgomery County Community Center has advised that they will remain closed through December 31, 2020. We will advise if there are any updates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our activities. I encourage you to continue to use good judgment in your upcoming activities. Please follow the guidelines for mask use and social distancing.

I recently learned that we lost one of our longest term members, Charles (Chuck) Suhr. Chuck passed away in July and with respect to family wishes there was no public service. Chuck wasn't active in the Post in recent years due to health reasons but previously was very active having held many leadership positions. Chuck was one of the first members who befriended me when I joined the Post in the early 90's. Even though he had become inactive I would still see him occasionally in the community and we would share memories and current experiences. He was well known to many in the Post and Auxiliary and will be missed.

One of the topics I am interested in is news about our MIAs. Below is a link to a website (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) that documents recovery of MIAs:

<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/>

This is an impressive website that showcases the diligence this agency pursues in accounting for our MIAs.

Some interesting military news from: <https://www.military.com/daily-news>

# Soldier Awarded Medal of Honor on Anniversary of 9/11 Attacks That Inspired Him to Fight



President Donald Trump awards the Medal of Honor to Army Sgt. Maj. Thomas P. Payne in the East Room of the White House on Friday, Sept. 11, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

11 Sep 2020

Military.com | By Matthew Cox

On the 19th anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attacks, President Donald Trump awarded Sgt. Maj. Thomas "Patrick" Payne the Medal of Honor, making him the first living member of the [Army's](#) elite Delta Force to receive the nation's highest award for valor.

The White House ceremony, which was far less crowded because of COVID-19 restrictions, featured senior Pentagon and Army leaders, members of Congress and three past recipients of the Medal of Honor.

Payne is credited with exposing himself to enemy fire multiple times to open a barricaded prison door during an October 2015 mission to rescue more than 70 Iraqi hostages from an Islamic State prison compound in the town of Hawija in northern Iraq.

"Today, it's my privilege to present the Congressional Medal of Honor to a warrior who has devoted the last two decades to fighting the forces of terror," Trump said.

Dressed in the new World War II-style Army Green Service Uniform, Payne stood at attention as the president highlighted his impressive military career. Payne's wife, Alison, and their 6-year-old son sat watching nearby.

"Exactly 19 years ago today on Sept. 11, 2001, news of the attack on our ... great country ... went through Pat's high school," Trump said. "In that moment, Pat was called to action. He knew that his country needed him."

Ten short months later, at the age of 18, Payne was in Army basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He would soon join the 75th Ranger Regiment.

Payne saw "heavy combat in multiple theaters, Trump said, describing how in 2010 Payne's leg was severely wounded by an enemy grenade in Afghanistan.

"Less than two years after being wounded, Pat competed against some of America's toughest warriors and won the prestigious Best Ranger Competition, among the most grueling physical contests anywhere in the country," Trump said.

In October 2015, Payne was on his 14th deployment, serving as an assistant team leader of a raid force from 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta that teamed up with Kurdish special forces to conduct a nighttime helicopter assault into the prison compound.

"The team soon received horrifying intelligence that the terrorists were planning to massacre their captives and bury them in freshly dug graves," Trump said. "After midnight on Oct. 22, Pat boarded a helicopter and departed on a mission to free the hostages from two buildings guarded by dozens of ruthless and bloodthirsty ISIS terrorists."

After landing, Payne and his team quickly liberated a group of hostages from their assigned building after meeting light resistance. About 30 yards away, American and Kurdish forces were fighting fiercely to enter the second building objective.

"Pat turned to one of his fellow soldiers and said, 'Let's get into the fight right now,'" Trump said.

Payne and his team quickly decided to maneuver to the top of that building but failed to gain entry. Flames and heavy smoke poured out of the building as enemy forces fought tenaciously to defend it.

Despite being under heavy enemy fire, Payne was able to cut the locks off of the prison door so his team could begin freeing hostages.

Multiple ISIS fighters detonated suicide vests, "ripping a portion of the building into pieces," Trump said, describing how the building began to collapse.

"Pat ran back into the burning building [two more times] as it was collapsing," Trump said. "He saved multiple hostages, and he was the last man to leave.

"It was one of the largest and most daring rescue missions in American history. Pat and his team rescued 75 captives and killed 20 ISIS terrorists."

But the mission was not without a heavy cost, Trump said, describing how Master Sgt. Joshua Wheeler was killed as he led Kurdish forces out of a crossfire.

Trump then asked Wheeler's wife, Ashley, to rise from her seat in the audience to be honored.

"Our nation endures because of those fearless warriors like Josh, who are willing to lay down their lives for our freedom," he said.

Trump then hung the Medal of Honor around Payne's neck, making sure it was straight.

"Pat, you embody the righteous glory of American valor," Trump said. "We stand in awe of your heroic daring and gallant deeds."

Army officials have identified Payne as a Ranger who was selected for assignment to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, but they have not publicly confirmed his affiliation with the elite and highly secretive Delta Force.

But two sources, who have served in Army special operations units and know Payne personally, confirmed to Military.com that Payne, like Wheeler, is a respected member of Delta Force.

Delta Force was formed in 1977. Two other Delta members were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in 1994, for their heroism during the Oct. 3, 1993, Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia. Those Medals of Honor, for the mission that would become famous for its portrayal in the book and film "Black Hawk Down," were the first awarded in any conflict after the Vietnam War.

Master Sgt. Gary Gordon and Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart posthumously received the medal for volunteering to enter the besieged city to protect the wounded pilot of a downed UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.

Payne recently told reporters at the Pentagon that he hopes he can be a suitable guardian of the prestigious honor.

"The spirit of the Medal of Honor lives inside every American; for me, I don't consider myself a recipient. I consider myself a guardian,"he said. "I just want to be a man that wears it well."

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# 95-Year-Old Army Vet Finally Receives Bronze Star for WWII Heroism



The Bronze Star medal. (Jon Quinlan/U.S. Air Force)

2 Oct 2020

The Los Angeles Times | By Hailey Branson-Potts

Eldon Knuth was trapped.

It was November 1944, and U.S. forces were fighting to liberate the heavily fortified French city of Metz from the Nazis.

When Knuth's battalion attacked the German-held Fort Jeanne d'Arc, he and about 30 other soldiers with the Army's 95th Infantry Division got stuck behind enemy lines, in the bitter cold, with meager supplies.

For five days, Pfc. Knuth, a 19-year-old Iowa farm boy, survived on military-issued chocolate bars called D-rations. His wet feet swelled as the trench foot that would trouble him for the rest of his life set in.

For their bravery, Knuth and his fellow soldiers would come to be known as the Iron Men of Metz.

But on a warm afternoon this week, as the 95-year-old World War II veteran was awarded one of the U.S. Army's highest honors, he was treated as delicately as an ancient vase. Organizers of the ceremony at his Thousand Oaks retirement village, where Knuth received a Bronze Star, mounted a defense against an invisible but deadly new enemy: COVID-19.

"It was utter chaos," Knuth recalled of the Metz standoff. "Not very many men ... made it to the fort. Some were injured. Some died. Some just turned around because the fire from the Germans was so intense."

Only a handful of people were allowed at the retirement facility's first in-person gathering since the pandemic began. Everyone wore masks. People stood far from Knuth to pay their respects, and there were no congratulatory handshakes. Residents were encouraged to watch from their rooms on an internal television channel.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime event. Normally, this would be standing-room only," said Dmitry Estrin, executive director of University Village, as he stood near the few dramatically spaced out chairs in a large event hall.

For older people like Knuth, a slight man with bright blue eyes and thin white hair who leans heavily on a walker, the coronavirus has been especially devastating.

That Knuth could have an in-person celebration at University Village, where he and his 94-year-old wife, Margaret, live with nearly 500 other retirees, meant a lot. He got the Bronze Star, which recognizes meritorious service in a combat zone, in the mail a month ago and figured that would be the end of it.

Retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Robert Johnson, who volunteers working with older veterans, said Knuth had long qualified for the Bronze Star but that it had been overlooked, as was common with World War II veterans.

Johnson helped Knuth apply to receive his long-overdue award, which took more than a year to arrive, and arranged the University Village event.

"This ceremony is very special," Knuth said, wearing a black suit jacket adorned with military service medals. His voice was muffled by a black cloth mask with a University Village logo and the words, "I Wear This Mask to Protect You."

Over the last six months, life has changed a lot for the Knuths.

He was an avid swimmer who hit the pool five times a week to maintain circulation in legs badly damaged by the cold, wet weather during the Battle of Metz. He was devastated when the

pandemic closed both the University Village pool and gym for several weeks, and he now has to make appointments to exercise.

He and Margaret don't socialize much, eating in their villa instead of in the dining hall with friends. They don't see their six children as often. And they worry about catching COVID-19 during doctors' appointments.

"It's stressful," Knuth said. "If you go out, you have to worry about, 'Am I going to come back with the virus?'"

There have been a few cases of COVID-19 among residents on the sprawling campus, which includes an adjacent skilled nursing facility called Oak View Health Center, Estrin said. But residents have been "great partners" with the safety protocols and have been successful at avoiding outbreaks, he said.

Tuesday's Bronze Star ceremony was a ray of hope after so many stressful months. Attendees said it was important to honor World War II veterans, whose numbers are dwindling.

At the 70th reunion of the Iron Men of Metz at Ft. Sill, Okla., last year -- where Knuth was awarded the French National Legion of Honor Medal -- there were only seven veterans. Fewer show up for each gathering, Knuth said.

"Our World War II veterans are becoming a rare sighting," Col. Gilbert Roldan, chief of staff of the California National Guard's 40th Infantry Division, said Tuesday. "It's a generation we're not going to be privileged to see anymore."

Roldan knows only three World War II veterans. During the pandemic, he said, he has been able to speak to them only by phone, so it was especially meaningful to attend Knuth's ceremony in person.

Maj. Gen. Laura L. Yeager, commander of the 40th Infantry Division and the first woman to lead an Army infantry division, said she "jumped at the opportunity" to present Knuth his Bronze Star. Coming three quarters of a century after his wartime service, she said, the award was "obviously overdue."

"With all we're dealing with in this country right now, this is a nice break," she said.

Wearing a mask as he sat at the front of the event hall, Knuth smiled as speakers -- who cleaned the microphone between each speech -- praised his valor and the full life he lived after the war. He was an engineering professor who taught for 35 years at UCLA, wrote more than 100 scientific papers and traveled the world with Margaret.

"We think we're living in trying times," Yeager told the audience. "And certainly the combined effects of pandemic, wild land fires, economic uncertainty, racial disparities and all the tensions that we face today are definitely rocking the state and the nation. But with reflection, we know that we have been through much worse."

Citing the old adage that when the going gets tough, the tough get going, she said Knuth "never stopped making the world a better place."

"Professor Knuth, you are tough," she said. "You are wicked smart. You are a lifelong learner, an adventurous traveler, accomplished genealogist, recognized researcher, prize-winning author, professor emeritus, mentor to others, dad, husband. You are an American hero."

Knuth pulled down his mask to smile as Yeager, still wearing hers, pinned the medal to his jacket. She took hers off for a few seconds to take a photograph, but not without first stepping away to keep a safe distance.

Handed a carefully wiped microphone, Knuth thanked Margaret, "my best friend."

Knuth's daughter-in-law, Carolyn Nicholson, 69, said she was delighted to celebrate him in person. They haven't seen each other much during the pandemic, and she drove more than two hours from Yucca Valley to attend.

"He's everything a Bronze Star should be," Nicholson said. "A wonderful man. Great intellect. A great inspiration to our family."

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# Former Fort Bragg Soldier, Sergeant Among 11 Charged in Marriage Fraud Ring



A photo illustration displaying wedding rings. (Joshua W. Brown/U.S. Marine Corps)

3 Oct 2020

The Fayetteville Observer, N.C. | By Rachael Riley

A former Fort Bragg soldier and a current sergeant are among 11 people charged in a marriage fraud ring, officials with the U.S. Attorney's Office announced this week.

A federal indictment alleges that 37-year-old Ebenezer Yeboah Asane, the former soldier, planned and organized the sham marriages of foreign nationals to soldiers at Fort Bragg, Robert J. Higdon Jr., the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina, said in a news release.

The charges include 29 counts of marriage fraud, transporting and harboring aliens, visa fraud, obstruction, unlawful disposition of U.S. property, false statements in immigration matters, and conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, the news release said.

The purpose of the conspiracy was for the foreign-born nationals to evade U.S. immigration laws and obtain lawful permanent resident status and for the soldiers to receive a basic allowance for housing to live off post, officials said.

Samuel Manu Agyapong, 33, a sergeant at Fort Bragg, has also been charged with obstructing an official proceeding by attempting to destroy evidence and influencing the testimony of a witness, the release said.

Others charged include:

- Christopher Matthew Urquia, 23, of Fort Bragg.
- Kevyn Jakob Ward, 22, of Fayetteville.
- William Steven Ballard, 23, of Fayetteville.
- James Earnest Ekow Arthur, 32, of El Paso, Texas.
- Effua Agyare-Darko, 43, of Ardsley, New York.
- Ernest Atta Gyasi, 43, of Bronx, New York.
- Solace Kwakye, 30, of Bronx, New York.
- Yemisi Mary Opasso, 27, of Hanover, Maryland.
- Barbara Oppong, 41, of Bronx, New York.

The indictment alleges that various defendants conspired with Asane to recruit other soldiers into the fraudulent scheme, orchestrated photographs to give the appearance the marriages were legitimate, and submitted false statements to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service in support of the sham marriages.

Officials said the investigation is ongoing. It is being conducted by the Department of Homeland Security's Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force and the Army Criminal Investigation Command.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Gabriel Diaz is representing the prosecution.

Officials said the maximum penalties are as many as five years in prison for marriage fraud, 10 years in prison for harboring aliens, 20 years for obstructing an official proceeding and 25 years for visa fraud.

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# Former Penn. Trooper, Army Vet Gets Probation for Falsifying Firearms Document



3 Oct 2020

Tribune-Review, Greensburg, Pa. | By Rich Cholodofsky

A former Pennsylvania State Police trooper convicted this year of falsifying public documents avoided a jail sentence Friday when a Westmoreland County judge said trauma suffered by two overseas military tours were enough to mitigate the need for incarceration.

Common Pleas Court Judge Tim Krieger conceded that Chad Corbett, who served 11 years in the state police before retiring with a disability in 2017, should be held to a high standard but that he could not overlook his Army service and resulting mental health issues he still endures from his deployments.

"I do not believe there is any sense to incarcerate Mr. Corbett," Krieger said during the sentencing hearing. "He will never be a police officer again, and he will suffer all the consequences of being a convicted felon."

Krieger, a Navy veteran, rejected a prosecution request to send Corbett to jail for 11 1/2 to 23 months and order him to serve three years on probation.

Corbett, 40, of New Derry, was convicted in February of a felony charge of falsifying public records and a misdemeanor count of making a false statement. Prosecutors said Corbett intentionally misrepresented his criminal record on March 6, 2018, when he completed required paperwork in order to take back ownership of two service revolvers at the Army-Navy Store in Latrobe.

At trial, Corbett maintained he simply made a mistake when he failed to disclose pending felony charges related to allegations he physically and sexually assaulted a woman in September 2017. Those counts were eventually dismissed on March 23, 2018, more than two weeks after the alleged falsification incident, as part of a deal in which he pleaded guilty to a summary harassment count and paid a \$300 fine.

In court Friday, Corbett testified with an emotional support dog on his lap. He said he still suffers from post-traumatic stress related to a deployment in Bosnia in 2001 and a tour of duty in Iraq in 2003.

"I have extreme anxiety and I don't like large crowds. I have trouble focusing, and there were times I couldn't get out of bed for two or three days. I still have bad days, but I am able to recognize when they are coming and reach out for help," Corbett said.

Assistant District Attorney Mike Pacek, also a veteran, thanked Corbett for his service but said that as a police officer he knew he was breaking the law when he intentionally misrepresented his criminal record. "Most police officers uphold the law and are trusted in their jobs. Just a small number are bad apples," Pacek told the judge.

"They (bad cops) need to be made an example of to show the public they can follow the rules. A jail sentence here could be a deterrent to show judges are holding bad cops accountable," Pacek said.

Defense attorney Fran Murrman argued that Corbett was found guilty of a nonviolent crime and that he has remained out of trouble since his arrest more than two years ago.

"He devoted most of his life, the best years of his life, to protect society," Murrman said.