

Dedication Remarks for “Milton A. Lee Medal of Honor Memorial Highway”
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Thank you, Commander Camplen.

VFW Post 688’s journey towards the goal of naming a major U.S. highway for a fallen American hero began two years ago. One of our Post’s World War II veterans, Mr. Jack Mulhollan, wrote a paper about a teenage boy that he and his wife, Dixie, knew back in the 1960s whose name was Milton Lee. Milton had been abandoned by his parents at an early age, and was raised by his grandmother in San Antonio. Over the years, Milton spent countless evenings, weekends, and summers with his best friend, Charles Nelson, whose family lived next door to the Mulhollans, up near PoPo’s restaurant, in rural Kendall County.

After attending Harlandale High School in San Antonio, Milton joined the Army in June of 1967. Six months of intense training, including “Jump School” to become a paratrooper, followed for Private Lee. In January of 1968, he found himself in Vietnam, assigned as an infantryman with the 101st Airborne Division. On April 26, 1968, at the age of 19, Private Lee was Killed-in-Action. His bravery and sacrifice earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor, which was presented to his family by President Nixon at The White House on April 7, 1970.

Jack and Dixie Mulhollan were concerned that, unlike most Medal of Honor recipients, Milton Lee had not been given widespread recognition. It is commonplace for our Nation’s greatest heroes to have schools, bridges, ships, buildings, and highways named in their honor. Milton’s only honor, until last year, was the naming of a Service Club at Fort Campbell, KY, in 1971. Jack wanted to correct that oversight, and with the help of former VFW Post Commander David Judson, Jack presented Milton’s story to the Boerne City Council in the summer of 2013.

Mayor Mike Schultz and the Boerne City Council were impressed by Jack’s presentation, and directed Parks & Recreation to include a pillar plaque for Private Lee as part of the renovation of Veterans’ Plaza, which was re-dedicated last year. The City of San Antonio also included a plaque for Milton at “The Medal of Honor River Portal” dedicated last year on the San Antonio Riverwalk.

While pleased with these new honors, the Mulhollans thought Milton deserved more, and Jack asked our VFW Post to help get Milton the additional recognition he deserved. One of our members, Mr. Rod Townsend, recently transferred here from another Post that had been successful in naming a highway for a local hero, and Rod drafted a proposal to name a ten-mile stretch of Interstate Highway 10 for Milton Lee. With his tongue firmly planted in his cheek, Rod said “You know, this won’t be difficult; all we need is an Act of Congress!” Really? So, last year on Veterans Day, Commander Camplen and I spoke with Congressman Lamar Smith, and he told us that he knew a thing or two about getting an “Act of Congress.”

True to his word, Congressman Smith immediately assigned the project to his assistant, Chris Morris. By the time House Bill 2559 was introduced on May 21st of this year, Mr. Morris's hard work had secured the support of local leaders, members of the Texas Legislature from this area, the Texas Department of Transportation, and the entire Texas delegation to Washington DC. Every single one of the other 35 U.S. Representatives from Texas and both U.S. Senators from Texas signed on as co-sponsors of Milton's Bill. HR 2559 was introduced on May 21st, passed the House unanimously on June 15th, passed the Senate unanimously on August 5th, and was signed into law by the President two days later on August 7, 2015. "Act of Congress," DONE! Thank you, Congressman Lamar Smith!

So, what exactly did Milton Lee do to earn the Medal of Honor? His citation reads as follows:

"Private First Class Milton A. Lee distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty on 26 April 1968, near the A Shau Valley in the Province of Thua Thien, Republic of Vietnam. Private Lee was serving as the radio telephone operator with the 3d Platoon, Company B, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. As lead element for the company, the 3d Platoon received intense surprise hostile fire from a force of North Vietnamese Regulars in well concealed bunkers. With 50 per cent casualties, the platoon maneuvered to a position of cover to treat their wounded and reorganize, while Private Lee moved through the heavy enemy fire giving life-saving first aid to his wounded comrades. During the subsequent assault on the enemy defensive positions, Private Lee continuously kept close radio contact with the company commander, relaying precise and understandable orders to his platoon leader. While advancing with the front rank towards the objective, Private Lee observed four North Vietnamese soldiers with automatic weapons and a rocket launcher lying in wait for the lead element of the platoon. As the element moved forward, unaware of the concealed danger, Private Lee immediately and with utter disregard for his own personal safety, passed his radio to another soldier and charged through the murderous fire. Without hesitation he continued his assault, overrunning the enemy position, killing all occupants and capturing four automatic weapons and a rocket launcher. Private Lee continued his one-man assault on a second position through a heavy barrage of enemy automatic weapons fire. Grievously wounded, he continued to press the attack, crawling forward into a firing position and delivering accurate cover fire to enable his platoon to maneuver and destroy the position. Not until the position was overrun did Private Lee falter in his steady volume of fire and succumb to his wounds. Private Lee's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, the 101st Airborne Division, and the United States Army."

You don't have to be a combat veteran to understand how very special, and truly noble, Milton Lee's actions were on April 26, 1968. Private Lee clearly demonstrated the four characteristics of actions that warrant the Medal of Honor: (1) conspicuous gallantry, (2) intrepidity, (3) risk of life, and (4) above and beyond the call of duty. Special, noble, and rare . . .

How rare? 2 million 700 thousand American Servicemen and women served in Vietnam between 1964 and 1975. As a point of reference, 2.7 million is the population of Chicago, our nation's 3rd largest city. In stark contrast, fewer than 260 Medals of Honor were awarded for service in Vietnam. So, earning the Medal of Honor was so rare during the Vietnam War that out of a group of participants as large as the city of Chicago, all of the warriors who won the Medal of Honor, had they all lived, would have easily fit into one corner of Veterans' Plaza where we are today. That rarity is, of course, why it is so important for us to honor each and every person who received the Medal. And, because three out of four, 75%, of Vietnam Medal of Honor winners did not return home alive to receive our thanks, it is just as important for us to recognize their families. So today, we honor Milton; and, in his absence, we honor his family and friends. At this time, I ask the family and friends of Milton Lee to please rise and allow us to recognize you.

In just a moment, Congressman Smith and Texas Transportation Commissioner Bruce Bugg will join Milton's family and friends in unveiling the signage for a ten-mile stretch of Interstate Highway 10, beginning at milepost 545 south of Boerne on the Kendall County/Bexar County line, to milepost 535 north of Boerne. This section of IH-10 will henceforth be known as the "PFC Milton A. Lee, Medal of Honor, Memorial Highway." How appropriate! Interstate 10 is a major, transcontinental, super highway stretching almost 2 thousand 5 hundred miles from Florida to California, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, literally from "sea to shining sea". Chad Lux, the Boerne area TXDOT supervisor, estimates that more than 20 million vehicles travel some portion of this ten-mile stretch, every year. Because of our actions here today, all the folks, in those millions of vehicles, will now know the name "Milton A. Lee"; and thanks to the support of local leaders like Mayor Mike Schultz and the national leadership of Congressman Lamar Smith, we can finally give Private Lee's family and friends confirmation of what he was in April of 1968, and what he still is today:

A True, American, Hero!