



## A Long-Delayed Purple Heart

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

In the late fall of 1781, after defeating the British at Yorktown, Va., Gen. George Washington moved his army of 7,000 soldiers north to winter at New Windsor, N.Y. After six years of struggle, it finally appeared the poorly equipped, badly fed and rarely paid revolutionary forces were on the verge of winning their independence.

As usual, Washington was far-sighted. He was strapped for funds. But as he surveyed his troops, survivors of unusual hardship, he stated:

“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”

These words of wisdom are as sound today as they were more than 225 years ago.

A few months later, Washington established our first military medal. The Badge of Military Merit, made of purple silk, was to be awarded “whenever any singular meritorious action is performed.”

Only three revolutionary war soldiers, all sergeants, were awarded the badge for heroic action. The medal was then forgotten for decades. Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur revived the award in February 1932, on the 200th anniversary of Washington’s birth, and renamed it the Purple Heart. This medal is now awarded to any soldier who is wounded or killed in combat.

Over the years, nearly 1.7 million Purple Hearts have been awarded, with well over 150,000 of the recipients having been Texans. The nationwide total includes one million for World War II, 137,000 for the Korea conflict, 200,000 for Vietnam duty, and approximately 28,000 for Iraq.

But one of the most recent Purple Hearts awarded to a Texas veteran occurred under somewhat unusual circumstances. Marine Sgt. Nyles Reed was injured near Panmunjom, Korea, in June of 1952 when an artillery shell exploded near the Jeep he was driving, turning it over.

Reed was transported to an aid station, where medics soon stitched up a wound beneath his left eye. The doctor asked Reed: “Do you want a Purple Heart?”

Instead of pausing to fill out the paperwork, Reed replied: “I haven’t got time! They’re waiting for me up at the front lines.” He returned to duty with his unit immediately.

Reed is now 75 years-old, a retired Alvin businessman and a great-grandfather. Recently, after more than 50 years, he decided it was time to claim his Purple Heart, so it could be part of

his family legacy. Then came the hard part—navigating the Pentagon bureaucracy.

Reed tried to enlist the help of various offices—including the White House and the Marine Commandant—but to no avail. He was repeatedly turned down. Because of the hectic circumstances of his injury, there was no record of the surgery. So Reed located two fellow Marines, who had served with him in Korea, to substantiate his account, and my office helped him navigate the other confirmation requirements.

Finally, Reed was informed he had been awarded the medal, and was sent a certificate. As for the medal itself, the Navy Personnel Command informed him it was “out of stock,” a statement that was not really accurate.

Tens of thousands of these medals are stored in various locations around the U.S., in large part because the Pentagon ordered the production of 500,000 Purple Hearts in 1945, anticipating an invasion of Japan that later became unnecessary.

Last month, at a patriotic public meeting in Pearland, I was honored to finally award Reed his long-delayed Purple Heart. It was a useful reminder of the debt we all owe to those who risk everything to protect our freedoms.

Reed also received the community’s heartfelt gratitude for his service. As George Washington hoped, the sacrifice of Reed and all our veterans is surely “appreciated by our nation.”

Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee’s Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee’s Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn’s previous Texas Times columns: [www.cornyn.senate.gov/column](http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/column).

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