

# Crowd gathers to greet heroes

WNS 9/11/2014



People give a patriotic welcome to Medal of Honor convention attendees Wednesday on the Clinch Avenue viaduct. Over 50 Medal of Honor recipients and their guests were departing for a dinner at Blackberry Farm in Walland.

## Medal recipients here for convention

By Lance Coleman  
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Hundreds of folks lined the Clinch Avenue viaduct Wednesday afternoon to greet Medal of Honor recipients as their vehicles passed underneath a giant American flag in front of the Knoxville Convention Center.

While the well-wishers came from a variety of backgrounds, they all had

a similar message.



MEDAL  
OF  
HONOR

Vicki Brant of Knoxville said she has a 92-year-old father who is World War II veteran and a

Purple Heart recipient who just last year received two Bronze Stars on Sept. 11.

"These are the heroes of our society and they're the reason we're able to have the freedoms we have," she said. "That is the least we can do is be out here to honor them."

Kelli Eldridge of Oak Ridge said her son served in Afghanistan and also received a Purple Heart.

"I wanted to show my respect to all the other fellow military service members and the Medal of Honor recipients," she said.

See GREETING, 10A

## Different wars, similar stories of valor

By Matt Lakin  
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Kyle Carpenter doesn't remember the moment he threw himself on a grenade four years ago to save a fellow Marine in Afghanistan.

"I don't recall any of the events leading up to it," he said Wednesday. "I woke up in the hospital five weeks later."

Tom Kelley remembers the moment when a rocket-propelled grenade exploded 6 inches from his head 45 years ago as he led a naval rescue mission on the banks of a Vietnam canal.

"It threw me around the boat a little bit, but we were able to continue," he said. "I was the guy in charge. I had to get all my guys out."

Carpenter, then 21, and Kelley, then 30, each received the Medal of Honor for their

See MEDAL, 10A



President Barack Obama awards retired Marine Cpl. William "Kyle" Carpenter, the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry on June 19 during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington. Carpenter received the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions while serving as an automatic rifleman in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

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Video: Hundreds welcome Medal of Honor recipients at Knoxville Convention Center.

Medal of Honor  
East Tennessee History Center  
Knoxville, Tennessee

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society is holding its annual convention in Knoxville this week, drawing 78 Medal of Honor recipients from around the country.

Ben Holland of Knoxville stood on the sidewalk and said there was no other place he would rather be.

"It is important to honor them," Holland said. "A lot of Medal of Honor recipients received their awards posthumously. They were extraordinary men who did extraordinary things. The least I can do is stand here and say, 'Thank you.'"

National Guard Staff Sgt. William Spencer Sr. brought his son, William Spencer Jr.

"The biggest thing is letting him see this tradition that the military holds up to our honored soldiers," he said. "I don't think you can do better than the Medal of Honor and giving gratitude to these soldiers."

"I'm proud to be a citizen and I give thanks to them," William Spencer Jr., said.

Jeremy and Caitlin Painter brought their son and daughter, Cameron and Milena, who held up signs to greet the Medal of Honor recipients.

"We wanted to come out and pay our respects for the men who sacrificed so much for us and we wanted to teach our kids what the Medal of Honor is and how great it is to have it in Knoxville," Jeremy Painter said.

actions. Each lost his right eye and nearly died. Kelley is among the oldest living recipients now at 75; Carpenter, who was presented the medal in June by President Barack Obama, so far is the youngest living recipient at 24.

They'll spend this week in Knoxville with dozens of other recipients of the nation's highest military award at the annual convention of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

"There are only 78 of us living, so it's a reunion for sure," Kelley said. "Each of us did what we had to do under the circumstances. What I did wasn't for a medal. It was for the guys with me."

"I'm still the same person as before, but it's enabled me to meet people I wouldn't have met otherwise and help get the message out about patriotism, service to others and doing the right thing. Anybody can do what we did under the right circumstances — they just need a little extra something dangled in front of them."

Kelley has attended various conventions of the society before; this year will be Carpenter's first.

"It weighs heavy on me," Carpenter said. "It represents a lot — history, sacrifice, the many who have gone before me. I just try to tell my story and the things I've lived and try to tell people there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

Carpenter and his comrade, Nicholas Eufrazio,



PHIL SPYRIDIS/NEWS SERVICE  
Medal of Honor recipient Tom Kelley of Somerville, Mass., talks about his Vietnam service Wednesday at the Holiday Inn World's Fair Park. Kelley was awarded America's highest honor for a battle in 1969 when he was a U.S. Navy lieutenant.

were on duty atop a roof in Afghanistan's Helmand province Nov. 21, 2010, when they came under attack. Hand grenades landed inside their post, and Carpenter threw himself on a grenade to save Eufrazio.

The shrapnel fractured Carpenter's skull, punctured his lung and caused a host of other injuries so severe the medical evacuation team expected him to die. He proved them

wrong, waking up from a coma in the same hospital as Eufrazio.

"Neither one of us was able to get up out of bed," he said. "We had to send each other messages written on a chalkboard."

Now he's finished with surgeries, has retired from the Marine Corps and is pursuing a degree in international studies at the University of South Carolina.

Kelley was a Navy lieutenant commanding a river assault division of eight boats June 15, 1969, during a mission to rescue a company of Army infantrymen on the east bank of the Ong Muong canal in Vietnam's Kien Hoa province when a boat broke down under enemy fire. Kelley moved his boat into the line of fire to buy time for repairs, and a grenade barely missed his head and shattered a pipe instead, spraying him with shrapnel.

Kelley couldn't stand up and could barely speak, but he kept command and got all 250 soldiers and sailors to safety.

"I still had two radios, one in each hand," he said. "We stopped the ambush, and the boat got fixed."

The convention lasts through the weekend.

**MEDAL OF HONOR CONVENTION**

**When:** Today-Saturday

**Events:**

■ **Greatest Heroes Concert,** 7-9 p.m. today, Tennessee Theatre, featuring the Charlie Daniels Band and the Air National Guard Band of the South

■ **Town Hall Forum,** 10-11:30 a.m. Friday, Cox Auditorium, University of Tennessee, and New Hope Center,

Y-12 National Security Complex, Oak Ridge. medal recipients are interviewed and answer audience questions

■ **Autograph session,** 2-4 p.m. Friday, Holiday Inn downtown Knoxville

■ **Patriot Award Gala,** 6:30-10 p.m. Saturday, Knoxville Convention Center, Supreme Court

Justice Samuel Alito Jr., golf commentator David Feherty, CNN's Jake Tapper and actor Mark Wahlberg will be recognized for their commitments to the military.

**More information:**  
[www.mohknoxville.com](http://www.mohknoxville.com)

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**Similar stories of valor**



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