

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) Senate Floor Speech
Honoring The Life Of Medal Of Honor Recipient, Gallup Resident Hiroshi
“Hershey” Miyamura

December 15, 2022

I am honored to join my friend and colleague, Senator Luján, to recognize the life of Congressional Medal of Honor recipient and Gallup’s own Staff Sergeant Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura, who passed away in November.

The State of New Mexico ordered flags to be flown at half-staff in honor of one of our state’s and really one of our entire nation’s greatest heroes.

A second generation Japanese American, Hershey Miyamura first volunteered for the U.S. Army near the end of World War II.

He did so at a time when many of his fellow Japanese Americans, and that includes his future wife, were detained in American internment camps.

He served in the storied 442nd Infantry Regiment, which was composed of soldiers with Japanese ancestry and became one of the most decorated units in U.S. military history.

Following the start of the Korean War in 1950, the Army recalled Miyamura—who had remained in the Army Reserves—into active duty.

The Korean War is often labeled the Forgotten War.

And it’s true that far too many Americans have forgotten the incredible sacrifices that were made by American service members who fought alongside Korean as well as United Nations allies.

More than 36,000 American service members and more than 7,200 members of the Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army gave their lives to defend a free and democratic South Korea.

And in the face of unthinkably harsh conditions, many service members demonstrated the very best of what it means to be an American.

None more so than Hershey Miyamura.

During an intense overnight firefight, from April 24 to April 25, 1951, then-Corporal Miyamura ordered the men in his machine gun squad to fall back.

Corporal Miyamura covered the withdrawal of his entire company from advancing enemy forces.

He killed more than 50 enemy combatants in both hand-to-hand combat and with his machine gun.

After he sustained severe wounds, enemy forces captured Corporal Miyamura as a Prisoner of War.

But not until after he had allowed all 16 of the men in his machine gun squad to safely withdraw.

In later years, Hershey was most proud of the fact that each and every one of the men who were under his charge that night survived the entire Korean War and returned home to their families.

After his capture, Corporal Miyamura marched hundreds of miles to a prisoner of war camp, where he would endure nearly two and a half years of captivity.

During this time, he served as a source of strength and comfort to many of his fellow prisoners of war as they all endured terrible conditions.

Nearly a month after an Armistice Agreement was reached, ending hostilities on the Korean Peninsula, Corporal Miyamura was finally turned over to American authorities in Freedom Village.

In a Living History interview conducted years later with the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, Hershey remembered what it was like to see the American flag flying again for the very first time.

Hershey said:

“Until I saw that flag, the Star Spangled Banner, waving in the breeze, did I know that I had learned what it represents. That alone is what makes you feel so humble.”

It was also only after his release that Hershey learned that his actions had earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Upon his return to the United States, President Dwight D. Eisenhower presented Corporal Miyamura with the Medal of Honor at a ceremony in the White House.

Hershey also received a Purple Heart, a Prisoner of War Medal, a Combat Infantryman Badge, and a Meritorious Service Medal, in addition to the service medals recognizing his service in both the Korean War and World War II.

He achieved final ranking in the U.S. Army of Staff Sergeant.

Hershey Miyamura’s lifelong dedication to his country never ceased.

It continued long after his decorated military service ended.

After he received his honorable discharge from the Army, Hershey opened up a service station along Route 66 in his hometown of Gallup, New Mexico.

He remained active in his community until his dying days, advocating for his fellow veterans and inspiring young people with lectures on patriotism, on faith, and on service.

It was one of the greatest honors of my own public service career to work alongside Hershey to open the VA's Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Gallup back in 2015.

And in 2018, I was also proud to join Hershey for a tour of the site that is now Gallup State Veterans Cemetery.

In recent years, Hershey touched the lives of countless young people in Gallup during his regular visits with students at the local high school that is named in his honor.

The Miyamura High School Patriots wear the colors purple and silver in honor of Hershey's Purple Heart.

And a bronze statue of Hershey in his Army uniform and wearing his Medal of Honor stands on the main entrance of Hiroshi Miyamura High School.

I hope that none of us will ever forget the profound example of humility and patriotism that Hershey Miyamura left to each of us as his enduring legacy.

Hershey Miyamura truly embodied the best of what our nation stands for.

My thoughts are with Hershey's daughter, Kelly, his sons, Pat and Mike, his four grandchildren, and all those in New Mexico and across our great nation who are mourning his loss and honoring his memory.