



**Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego
Western Recruiting Region**

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Vietnam Era Veterans Receive Bronze Star Award at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego

MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT SAN DIEGO, Calif. (~~Jun. 30, 22~~[Jun. 27, 22](#)) – Three Vietnam War veterans were awarded the Bronze Star Medal on Friday, June 24 on the parade deck [aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego](#), following the recruit graduation ceremony. The veterans were recognized fifty-four years after their valiant actions in the war.

John Ligato III and Larry D. Lewis, who served as riflemen, and Michael B. Ker, who served as a corpsman with Alpha Company, [First Battalion, First Marines](#)~~First Battalion, First Marine Division~~, received the awards for their heroic achievements in combat during the Battle of Hue City from January 31 to February 5, 1968. During the battle, now regarded as the longest and bloodiest of the Vietnam War, all three men showed great courage under fire and unwavering dedication to duty as they fought house-to-house in the streets of Hue City. The award citations credit all three men with putting themselves in the line of enemy fire to complete their mission as well as rescue their fallen comrades.

“When the company column was taken under attack enroute to Hue, he repeatedly crossed open terrain under heavy enemy fire to render aid to wounded Marines,” states the award citation for Ker, “Hospital Corpsman Second Class Ker and two Marines lifted the stricken commander onto a poncho and carried him to safety amid withering small arms, rocket, and automatic weapons fire.”

After their commander was injured in battle, the men followed the lead of their company gunnery sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant John L. Canley. Tasked with assaulting an enemy controlled complex, the

company followed Canley as they cleared the building from room to room engaging in close combat with the enemy.

“When the attack stalled due to fierce resistance, another Marine (Canley) maneuvered amid enemy rocket and automatic weapon fire to employ an explosive charge. Private First Class Ligato exposed himself to enemy fire in order to provide cover for the Marine, enabling success of the mission.”

Gunnery Sergeant Canley received a Silver Star in 1970 for his actions in Hue City. Fifty years after the battle, and after over a decade long campaign lead by John Ligato, Sergeant Major (retired) Canley’s Silver Star was historically upgraded to the Congressional Medal of Honor in 2018. Canley was the first **black African American** Marine to receive the nation’s highest military honor. Despite his own recognition, Canley was a strong advocate for the recognition of his **fellow** Marines for their contributions in the war.

“It means a lot to me,” said Canley in a 2018 interview in regards to his Medal of Honor, “Mostly for my Marines because we’ve had to wait 50-plus years to get any kind of recognition. It’s not about me. It’s about the Marines who didn’t receive the appropriate recognition when we got home.”

Sergeant Major Canley passed away on May 22 of this year at 84 years old.

Presenting the Bronze Star Awards were the Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego Commanding General, Brigadier General Jason L. Morris, as well as Major General (retired) Ray L Smith, who relieved Gunnery Sergeant Canley of his short command during the Battle of Hue City. In attendance were 12 other veterans of Alpha 1/1 as well as the Canley family.

“Surprisingly, nobody wanted this,” said Ligato following the ceremony, “It was Sergeant Major Canley that was most angry that his junior enlisted Marines got nothing and he was the impetus for this. He put the (award) packages in.”

Following the ceremony, the members of Alpha 1/1 attended the christening of the newest U.S. Navy Expeditionary Sea Base class ship, the USS John L. Canley. The ship, officially designated in honor of Canley in November 2020, began its service just thirty-four days after the passing of it’s namesake.