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Medal of Honor recipient James A. Taylor stands in front of a photo of himself at the Visions of Valor exhibit at MCRD.

Visions of Valor on display for all to see

Traveling Medal of Honor exhibit stops at MCRD

Lori Martinez
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Visions of Valor, the first and largest exhibit to honor recipients of the Medal of Honor, has stopped at the Marine Corps Recruiting Depot (MCRD). The national tour, sponsored by TriWest Healthcare Alliance, recognizes men who have earned the nation's highest military award for valor under fire.

The exhibit was created to educate the public of the legacy of the Medal of Honor and to perpetuate their legacy of patriotism, courage and honor," said Elizabeth Perrine, director of corporate communications for TriWest, a Phoenix-based corporation that partners with the Department of Defense to provide military health care.

Guests of honor John Baca and James A. Taylor, both Medal of Honor recipients, were introduced at the Nov. 9 opening ceremony by Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Jeff Janowiec of the MCRD public affairs office.

According to Janowiec, there are only 111 Medal of Honor recipients alive today. The youngest living recipient, Gordon Robbins, 56, is still serving in the Army, while the eldest, John Finn, 97, fought at Pearl Harbor and was awarded the first medal given during World War II.

"Though these numbers are small, these gentlemen are revered by millions, not just in the United States but around the world," Janowiec said.

One of TriWest's two Visions of Valor collections " comprising 140 black-and-white portraits of Americas Medal of Honor recipients by famed portrait photographer Nick Del Calzo" is on permanent display at the Pentagon. The

other collection, the traveling exhibit now at MCRD, was first displayed on Dec. 7, 2005, at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in Phoenix, Ariz. Before landing in San Diego, the exhibit traveled to the Naval Medical Center San Diego; the United States Air Force Academy; Evans Army Community Hospital in Fort Carson, Colo.; the Hawaii State Art Museum in Honolulu; and the National Homeland Defense Foundation Symposium in Colorado Springs.

“Our hope that these photographs and the stories of these remarkable men and the valor they have displayed will serve as inspiration to all who have a chance to see them,” said Frank Maguire, vice president of provider and healthcare services for TriWest.

Stories of heroism were shared at the opening ceremony.

A retired Army captain, Taylor received his Medal of Honor after personally rescuing a number of his fellow soldiers from burning cavalry assault vehicles during an enemy assault west of Que Son during the Vietnam War, despite being wounded himself.

Specialist Fourth Class (Sp4c.) Baca, now retired from the Army, also received his Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty when preparing to assist another platoon against enemy fire. As Baca’s team prepared to engage the enemy, a fragmentation grenade was thrown into their midst. Baca then covered the grenade with his steel helmet and fell on it as the grenade exploded, absorbing the lethal fragments and concussion with his body, saving eight men from certain serious injury or death.

MCRD Commanding Officer Brig.Gen. Angie Salinas spoke to the crowd about the youth of today and their obsession with sports stars and athletes.

“They’re looking for that person they want to emulate,” she said, “and to me, they should not look very far but just look to their left or to their right, because there are common people, like these men here, who never probably would have imagined that one day they would do something extraordinary, something that would warrant the highest award of our nation, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

“I wish every young person in this country could see you and that you would be the posters on their wall. That they would wake every day and wish that they could be just a little bit like you.”

The Visions of Valor exhibit will remain on display through Jan. 2, 2007, and then continue on its tour with more stops planned in California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Alaska, Kansas and Missouri.

The exhibit is open to the public Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.; closed Dec. 30. MCRD is located at 1600 Henderson Ave. For directions, visit www.mcrdsd.usmc.mil/directions.htm. For more information about Visions of Valor, visit www.triwest.com and click on Visions of Valor.

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