

90-year-old Vet awarded purple heart

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John I. Miles Jr. of Monroe will go to his 90th birthday party today as a decorated war hero.

"Sixty-three years later and the government finally does it," Miles said Wednesday with a laugh, and then turns serious. "I'm most thankful to God I survived it all.

"Three years, with most spent in the jungle, and there's just not much left of you."

U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, presented the eight medals to Miles "on behalf of President Bush and the rest of Congress, who appreciate your sacrifice."

Alexander presented the medals, including the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart, in a short ceremony at the congressman's office.

Miles earned the medals as a U.S. Army infantryman with the 43rd Infantry Division during World War II.

When Alexander asked Miles which medal gave him most pride, the energetic 90-year-old quickly responded the Bronze Medal with four combat stars representing Guadalcanal, New Guinea, Philippines and Luzon.

"We were all in a situation where you could get a Purple Heart," Miles said. "But the Bronze Medal is the third-highest in importance. I'm proud of it."

An infantry shell fragment cut through his right leg on one of the nine islands in the South Pacific on



which he fought. When pressed for more information about his wound, he would move on to another topic.

"There was one other time I got wounded, but we

won't talk about that," he said. "It's not important."

What he did relate was that he broke a leg while on R&R in New Zealand. Was it a war injury?

"No, just fighting and scuffling," he said. "We'd been fighting the Japanese for 16 straight months without much food or water. They had some of that juice, and we got into it."

Because of his small size, he missed the first night on the town.

"They kicked me out the back of the truck, but I made it the second night," Miles said.

A native of Crowley and close associate with former Gov. Edwin Edwards, Miles is a retired state employee. He worked with the Department of Public Safety, Division of Motor Vehicles.

He and his wife Mary married two weeks after Pearl Harbor was bombed. She also served in the Army and served at Selman Field and the Pentagon in Washington.

Miles said Mary died 16 years ago. They raised two sons, Marty of Crowley and Jeff of Dallas. Miles had served three years with the National Guard before being drafted at the age of 23.

Other medals earned by Miles were the Good Conduct, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one silver star, World War II Victory Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge 1st Award, Philippine Liberation Ribbon and Honorable Service Lapel Button World War II.

Friends and family are giving Miles a birthday party at 11:30 a.m. today at the Piccadilly Cafeteria on Louisville Avenue, Monroe.