

Gus Helps Local War Heroes Get Lost Honors

On Thursday, Gus presented eight local war heroes with medials earned on the battlefield during World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Local award recipients included . . .

- Lawrence Biondi, Palm Harbor, Fla. – Combat Infantryman Badge

- Frank Cello, Clearwater, Fla. – Bronze Star, Combat Infantryman Badge, and WW II Victory Medal

- William Decker, Palm Harbor, Fla. – Bronze Star

- James Doss, Palm Harbor, Fla. – Marine Corp, Navy Achievement Medal

- Eldon J. Giles, Palm Harbor, Fla. – Purple Heart Medal

- Joseph W. Neill, Clearwater, Fla. – Bronze Star

- Steve Pruslak, Seminole, Fla. – Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Medal, WW II Victory Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Sharpshooter Badge with Rifle Bar

- Norman Ressler, Hudson, Fla. – WW II Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign with 2 Bronze Stars, Combat Action Ribbon

The St. Pete Times was there to cover it . . .

Tucked inside the briefcase Joseph Neill lost years ago in Dayton, Ohio, was the Bronze Star he earned as a soldier in Vietnam. On Thursday, the U.S. Army veteran stepped up to a lectern at Lake Tarpon Village where U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, handed him a replacement. "When I came home from Vietnam, soldiers were not held in too much esteem," said Neill, 61, of Countryside. "It's a very nice thing they are doing here today."

During the hourlong ceremony, seven other veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam followed Neill to the lectern.

Collectively, they received 20 medals they lost or never received after coming home from battle. The honors included Bronze Stars, Purple Hearts, Combat Infantry Badges, WWII Victory Medals, Navy Achievement Medals and others.

Six of the honored veterans from left, Norman Ressler, Bill Decker, Frank Cello, Eldon Giles, Steve Pruslak and Joseph Neill listen as Lawrence Biondi, not pictured, accepts his award. [Douglas R. Cliff | St. Pete Times]

Bilirakis learned of their stories through a Veterans Advisory Board made up of residents.

It was the second time Bilirakis presented veterans with medals during his first term in office.

"My service pales compared to their service," Bilirakis told about 100 of the veterans' friends and family members. "What they sacrificed for their country, only they know."

The ceremony was held in the social hall of Lake Tarpon Village, a retirement community just off U.S. 19 with a strong veteran presence. [Read more...](#)