



Medal of Honor Ceremony for

Richard Etchberger

Wednesday, 22 September 2010



General Norty Schwartz

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Chief Roy, thank you very much for that stirring account of Chief Etchberger's heroism. I think that we can all agree: such singular valor can never be retold too many times. Stories like this inspire the efforts of those who serve today, and legends like Chief Etchberger serve as role models for an entire new generation of everyday Airmen performing extraordinary deeds.

Some may ask how it is that we are here, 42 years after the events of March 10th and 11th, 1968. First, we must recognize that we get to celebrate today because of the untiring dedication and efforts of Chief Etchberger's family; of leaders like Congressman Pomeroy; and, of Airmen and intelligence community counterparts who never forgot. We thank all of you for the opportunity today to memorialize Chief Etchberger, and to celebrate the inscription of his name onto the most distinguished roster of our Nation's most honored heroes.

We are also here today because valor has no expiration date; because courage is timeless; and because the discovery of truth, no matter how long it is delayed, sets the record straight.

Today, we are here to do exactly that—provide incontestable clarity to the exceptional heroism of Chief Master Sergeant Dick Etchberger. We are here to thank his family, who, for decades, has known the truth: that their father, their grandfather, their great-grandfather was a hero who persisted in the face of fire and in the chaos of battle, against overwhelming odds, at great personal risk, and therefore, is deserving of the Medal of Honor.

But, while the Medal of Honor recognizes only one individual, we know that Chief Etchberger—whose courage was matched only by his humility, selflessness, and generosity—would want us to recognize that his valor was enabled—in fact inspired—by other brave men. So, today, we also praise the actions of those who fought with Chief Etchberger—heroes such as Stan Sliz and John Daniel, who both shared that harrowing night on the ridge of the cliff at Lima 85, as well as Ken Wood, Rusty Irons, Rus Cayler, and Joe Panza.



And, this ceremony is also for a whole generation of Vietnam veterans whose due recognition was also too long delayed. To them: we confirm that we honor your service, your sacrifice, your courage, and your commitment during a period with too little public support; and, we express to you our most heartfelt thanks.

Also, we are here 42 years later to hold up Chief Etchberger as a model for all Airmen. When a young Dick Etchberger enlisted in the Air Force in August of 1951, he had a high aptitude for electronics and a dream to fly. Whether he had an expectation of engaging in a hostile firefight, directly in contact with enemy ground forces, we may never know for sure.

But, what we do know is that he exemplified the deepest meaning of our Air Force Core Values: *Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in All We Do*. And, we know that he typified the grit, determination, and commitment that reside in all our Airmen today. Some are Airmen who perform more traditional roles in providing air, space, and cyber capabilities. Others are battlefield Airmen who are regularly involved in “outside-the-wire” missions, and yet others are in non-traditional roles. Whether clearing improvised explosive devices from roads, driving and securing supply convoys through the countryside, or leading teams that help to reconstruct shattered societies, our Airmen are on point each and every day.

And, they look to heroes like Chief Etchberger, who is now one of the most important examples of courageous and magnificent performance, even in a role that was out of his comfort zone. Today, we specifically train some of our Airmen for the type of situation in which the Heavy Green team found themselves at Lima Site 85. I am confident that today’s Airmen who, with their tactical acumen and their accomplishments in extraordinary situations, would make Chief Etchberger proud.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to continue to pay a debt to the Etchberger family—one that can never be fully repaid. But, by emblazoning the story of Chief Master Sergeant Dick Etchberger into our hearts once again—a story that will now be properly celebrated for all time—we are one step closer to a debt repaid.

Secretary Donley, thank you for the words that you are about to offer that will further enrich this inspiring narrative. Thank you.