



S M D C / A R S T R A T

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On June 6, it was my distinct honor to present Bronze Stars to three World War II Soldiers, one of them posthumous, and a posthumous Purple Heart to the family of a World War II Sailor.

The two former Soldiers who participated, Mr. Ira P. Jones Jr. and Mr. Dewel J. McGriff, continue to embody the excellence that has kept our Army strong for 234 years. These gentle giants of the "Greatest Generation" are as strong in spirit now as they were 65 years ago. When I looked into their eyes, I knew they were still Soldiers – living links to our Army past. During the ceremony, a posthumous Bronze Star was presented to the family of Mr. Roy C. Selby and a posthumous Purple Heart was presented to the family of Mr. Raymond Virgil Ashburn.

These four great Americans are inspirations to us all as we celebrate the 234th birthday of the United States Army. I don't think that on June 6, 1944, the Soldiers who went ashore during D-Day could know that 65 years later the U.S. Army would be the strongest in the world. Just as in 1775, when the citizens banded together, on a square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, could they have known that their courage and passion for liberty would form a great nation. The first Soldiers of 1775 set the standard for selfless service and courage by leaving their farms, their shops, and their livelihood for an uncertain future.

Generations of Soldiers have followed in their footsteps to build the magnificent Army we have today. It is a values-based Army made up of Active, Reserve and National Guard Soldiers as well as Department of the Army Civilians. The centerpiece of our formations continues to be the Soldier, and at the core of the Soldier are our values.

Those values are what keep us steady in an ever-changing environment. Our leaders envision a future of persistent conflict; one in which we are challenged by hybrid threats such as irregular forces, terrorists and criminal elements. Futurists, such as Alvin Toffler, write about the emergence of a "Third Wave" – the Information Age – where turbulence and violence could last for decades. Amid this chaotic milieu stands the Army Soldier, resolute and strong. The environment and conditions may swirl and change, but what have not changed are the Army standards and our values.

Mr. Jones and Mr. McGriff remind us that the values that make us Army Strong remain long after the uniform is put away. Today, our Soldiers continue that tradition. There are more than 260,000 Soldiers deployed around the globe with some 148,000 in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. The deployments are long and repetitious, but our Soldiers' spirits are still high and they continue to re-enlist, surpassing our goals.

America's Soldiers continue to serve, on-duty or off-duty, active or retired. When our Soldiers take off the uniform, for a day or forever, they are active members of their communities; they volunteer in their schools, they help out in their churches, synagogues and temples, or they are members of service organizations.

This month, I ask our Soldiers and Army Civilians to celebrate our Army birthday by telling those you know what you do and why. You'll be amazed at the questions you get and the interest you generate.

Thanks to all of you for your dedicated and faithful service.

SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!