



The President of the United States  
in the name of the Congress  
takes pleasure in presenting the  
**MEDAL OF HONOR** to  
**CORPORAL**  
**HERSCHEL W. WILLIAMS,**  
United States Marine Corps Reserve,  
for service as set forth in  
the following citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his own life above and beyond the call of duty as Demolition Sergeant serving with the First Battalion, Twenty-First Marines, Third Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Island, 23 February, 1945.

Quick to volunteer his services when our tanks were maneuvering vainly to open a lane for the infantry through the network of reinforced concrete pillboxes, buried mines and black, volcanic sands, Corporal Williams daringly went forward alone to attempt the reduction of devastating machine gun fire from the unyielding positions.

Covered only by four riflemen, he fought desperately for four hours under terrific enemy small-arms fire and repeatedly returned to his own lines to prepare demolition charges and obtain serviced flame throwers, struggling back, frequently to the rear of hostile replacements, to wipe out one position after another.

On one occasion he daringly mounted a pillbox to insert the nozzle of his flame thrower through the air vent, kill the occupants and silence the gun; on another he grimly charged enemy riflemen who attempted to stop him with bayonets and destroyed them with a burst of flame from his weapon.

His unyielding determination and extraordinary heroism in the face of ruthless enemy resistance were directly instrumental in neutralizing one of the most fanatically defended Japanese strong points encountered by his regiment and aided in enabling his company to reach its' [sic] objective.

Corporal Williams' aggressive fighting spirit and valiant devotion to duty throughout this fiercely contested action sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

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Herschel Woodrow "Woody" Williams was presented the military's highest decoration for valor, the Medal of Honor, October 5, 1945 by President Harry Truman. Photo by Doug Bachman.



The Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments are two-sided and made of black granite. To date, the Herschel "Woody" Williams Foundation has installed 104 monuments in all 50 states and Guam and 71 more are in progress. Photo by Doug Bachman.

# HERSCHEL WOODROW "WOODY" WILLIAMS

## "THE CAUSE IS GREATER THAN I"

BY LEEANN MIONE

**W**hat makes someone reach the heights of greatness? What leads them to impact the world in such a big way that they will never be forgotten?

Woody Williams lived a very big life. A life that made an impact on American history and impacted every life he touched. He didn't aspire to be unforgettable, he just aspired to live a life of service to his fellow man and he spent every day working to help others.

Herschel Woodrow "Woody" Williams was born October 2, 1923 and passed away Wednesday, June 29, 2022 at the age of 98; the last living Marine Corps WWII recipient of the Medal Of Honor.

Woody grew up on a dairy farm in Quiet Dell, West Virginia, the youngest of 11 children, and had two brothers who both served in the Army. He wanted to carve

his own path, but when he tried to join the Marines in 1942 he was rejected for being too short at 5' 6". When the height restrictions were changed the following year he was accepted to the Marine Corps Reserve.

His training began in San Diego, California, and by July of 1944, soon-to-be 21-year-old Woody found himself participating in the battle of Guam. His next and final campaign began on February 21, 1945 when he and his battalion landed on the island of Iwo Jima, one of the Japanese Volcano Islands.

His actions in the course of the five-week battle not only earned him the Purple Heart, they earned him the military's highest decoration for valor for going above and beyond the call of duty. Woody returned home in September 1945 and he and fiancé Ruby, his source

of strength and calm during the war, were married October 19th. They were married for 60 years.

Before he enlisted, Woody worked as a cab driver and delivered War Department telegrams for Western Union that informed families their loved one had died in the war.

Households would display a flag with blue stars if they had soldiers currently fighting or gold stars which signified they had family members who died. The impact of delivering those telegrams and seeing those flags affected Williams greatly and led to his life's mission of doing everything in his power to help his fellow soldiers and the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.



Woody and Ruby began breeding and showing Morgans after their twin daughters Tracie and Travie grew up and left home. He is pictured here with Casland Delmonte.



Ruby was Woody's source of strength and comfort during WWII and they were married for 60 years.



Shown here with Morgan Shamrock Skymeade, Woody had great success as a trainer, of both Saddlebreds and Morgans, despite no formal training. He and Ruby built Royal Winds Farm in the late 1960s and it continues today with Todd and Kim Graham.

He was a man who always did what he said he was going to do. Whenever a problem needed to be solved, Woody went about seeking a solution. His desire to serve those who sacrificed so much led to his creation of the Woody Williams Foundation. The foundation has established 104 Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments in every state of the union and Guam and 71 additional monuments are underway.

His most recent, and ongoing, project is to make much needed improvements to the 348-acre Donel C. Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery near Dunbar, West Virginia. The cemetery will eventually provide a resting place for 66,000 veterans and their families. Completing the project was one of his final wishes.

Woody spent 33 years working for the Department of Veterans Affairs as a veterans service representative and it is because of him that the state of West Virginia has a veterans hall of fame and medals of honor. It was a position that he was perfect for because he could talk to anyone, from U.S. Presidents to farmers and everyone in-between. His humble background and innate kindness made him a natural.

Woody grew up on a dairy farm and he loved the horses that made it possible to get each day's work done. His uncle lived between Woody's home and school and he owned a pacing horse (probably a Standardbred) named "Gayle". Woody and Gayle were often victorious in their races against the boys who lived on neighboring farms and Woody taught himself how to mount on the fly so they could get a quick start.

His time spent with horses as a young man fostered a lifelong passion. Woody had no formal training as a horse trainer but he was a voracious reader and student. He wasn't going to let the fact that he didn't know how to breed, raise or train show horses stop him from jumping into the industry with both feet. He knew he could overcome a lack of knowledge with an abundance of hard work and a "failure is not an option" attitude.

Woody and Ruby had two daughters; Tracie and Travie. Woody and Tracie started showing Saddlebreds when she was about 10 years old. Even though Travie was allergic to horses she and Ruby cheered from the sidelines and Ruby always had a video camera in her hand. The whole family embraced the world of showing horses.

Woody and Ruby built Royal Winds Farm in the late 60s and moved it to its location on Wire Branch Road in Ona, West Virginia, in 1970. Woody was in his late 40s by then and the farm was having plenty of success under his direction.

When Tracie got married and left home Woody and Ruby began breeding and showing Morgans including Royal Winds Balata, Royal Winds Cypress, Royal Winds Douglas, Royal Winds Laliska, Royal Winds Skyrock, Royal Winds Treasure, Royal Winds Lelani and Devan Scarlet.

Tracie's sons, Todd Graham and younger brother Chad Graham, both grew up showing their family's horses. Todd's first word was "Horse" and all he ever wanted to be was a horse trainer. Period. For him there was no other choice or back up plan. He and his grandfather were kindred spirits and shared an incredible bond. When it came to horses, Todd and Woody seemed to speak their own language. When Todd was about 17, Royal Winds Farm went back to training and showing American Saddlebreds.

Woody always knew Todd would expand and grow Royal Winds Farm and when Todd decided he was ready, Woody co-signed the loan but he made Todd buy the farm. It wasn't a gift. Under Todd and wife Kim's guidance, Royal Winds Farm has expanded to a second location in Paris, Kentucky to continue their tradition of training, showing, breeding and selling top American Saddlebreds.

Chad trained Saddlebreds for a while and still shows them occasionally but it is his position as President and CEO of his grandfather's foundation that now claims most of his time. Woody's grandsons Brent and Bryan Casey also help run the foundation as do other members of the family.

Woody earned several awards and accolades for his service and bravery and he was grateful for every one of them even though he always maintained that the glory never belonged to him.

He performed the coin toss at Super Bowl LII in 2018 between The Philadelphia Eagles and the New England Patriots, and it was also a special honor when the Huntington Veterans Administration Medical Center was renamed the Herschel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center in that same year.

He was often asked to be the guest speaker and/or honored guest at ceremonies all over the country

and was called a hero by people from all walks of life but when the United States Navy's new warship, USS Herschel "Woody" Williams, was christened in 2017 in his honor, he declared that it ranked "near the top" of unforgettable moments in his life; perhaps second only to receiving the Medal Of Honor.

The ship went into service in February of 2018. At the commissioning ceremonies in March of 2020 he surprised everyone, and at the same time no one who really knew him was surprised, by giving his Medal Of Honor to the crew of the ship. The ship's motto, created by Woody himself, is "Peace we seek, peace we keep" and his Medal Of Honor is now enshrined in the ship's galley.

Woody's dedication and service to the military spanned decades and his dedication and service to his beloved West Virginia spanned a lifetime. Just as he loved his family, loved God, loved the military and loved West Virginia, the people of West Virginia loved him and were tremendously proud to call him their own.

As he made his final trip from the name-sake Veterans Administration Medical Center in Huntington to the Capitol Building in the state's capital city of Charleston, to lie in state, thousands of people lined the 30-plus mile route to pay their final respects for this man who lived such a big life.

On July 14th, the United States showed its gratitude for this American hero by making him only the seventh private citizen, after Rosa Parks, Reverend Billy Graham and four Capitol police officers, to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda in our nation's capital in Washington, D.C.

A grateful nation paid tribute to a man whose family knew him as Herschel, dad, and Papa. He was a man of "The Greatest Generation" who put God, service, family and country first. He lived a life of humility, conviction and integrity that impacted his family, the horse industry, his community and his country in a positive way and his foundation will continue to help and support Gold Star Families in his honor.

If you would like to support the Woody Williams Foundation, visit: [www.woodywilliams.org](http://www.woodywilliams.org). Donations can be sent to 12123 Shelbyville Rd., Suite 100, Louisville, Ky 40243.

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