

# Alexandria Gazette Packet



25 CENTS

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MARCH 2, 2023



Army Col. Paris Davis (ret) holds a photo of himself during his service in Vietnam. The Alexandria resident will receive the Medal of Honor from President Joe Biden March 3 at the White House, 58 years after saving his men in a fierce 1965 battle in Vietnam.



Then Capt. Paris Davis, left, congratulates trainees on completion of training in South Vietnam.

PHOTOS/THE PARIS DAVIS INTERACTIVE MOH STORY

## Paris Davis to Receive Medal of Honor

Local veteran  
cited for heroics  
in Vietnam.

By JEANNE THEISMANN  
GAZETTE PACKET

**P**aris Davis, an Alexandria resident and one of the first African American officers to lead a Special Forces team in combat, will receive the Medal of Honor from President Joe Biden in a ceremony March 3 at the White House.

A highly decorated veteran who served 23 years in the U.S. Army, Davis will receive the nation's highest award for bravery on the battlefield more than half a century after his heroics during the Vietnam War.

On June 18, 1965, a wounded and bloodied Davis, then a Special Forces captain, twice refused orders to quit the battlefield of Bong Son until he had saved multiple wounded teammates in a brutal 19-hour hand to hand battle with a Viet Cong battalion.

According to the Army Times, Davis repeatedly sprinted into an open rice paddy to rescue each member of his team using his pinkie finger to fire his rifle after an enemy grenade shattered his hand. Due to his heroics, Davis's entire team survived the battle.

At the end of the battle, Davis was recommended for the Medal of Honor by one of the men he had rescued that day. That 1965 nomination package was lost by the Army, as was a subsequent nomination made in 1969.

Davis was eventually awarded a Silver Star, the third-highest military combat med-



Paris Davis is presented with the Silver Star for his heroics in Vietnam.

al, but members of his team, many who have suggested that race was a factor in the handling of his nomination, persisted in their push to have Davis recognized for his bravery with the Medal of Honor.

"There were not many African Americans in Special Forces," said Davis in an interview for a Special Operations Command profile. "I had a lot of people say to me 'Are you sure you want to go into Special Forces? I don't see a lot of people who look like you there.' But I was inspired by President Kennedy, who created the Special Forces, and wanted to be a part of it. I knew what I was getting into."

Davis joined the Army in 1962 and was first deployed to Vietnam in 1963. His commands included the 1st Special Forces Com-



Capt. Paris Davis, center, gives a tour of his camp in South Vietnam to Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, left, and Maj. Billy Cole.

**"There were not many African Americans in Special Forces. I knew what I was getting into."**

— Army Col. Paris Davis (ret)

mand, 5th Special Forces Group and 10th Special Forces Group.

Now 83 years old, Davis retired from the Army as a colonel in 1985. For 30 years, he published the Metro Herald, an African American newspaper that was headquartered on North Washington Street.

Still, the Medal of Honor nomination lan-

guished until January of 2021, when then Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller ordered an expedited review of the lost nomination.

In a widely published editorial written in June of 2021, Miller said that the military bureaucracy was continuing to stall the review and urged President Biden to award Davis the Medal of Honor.

The announcement finally came in November of 2022 that General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had approved the nomination followed by approval by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Davis will formally receive the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony March 3 followed by a March 6 ceremony at the Pentagon.



# ‘Freedom Is Not Free’

Youngkin honors local Vietnam heroes Davis and McDaniel.

“Thank you again for reminding all of us that freedom is not free.”

— Gov. Glenn Youngkin in honor of Col. Paris Davis and Capt. Eugene “Red” McDaniel



Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin, center, stands with Navy Capt. Eugene “Red” McDaniel (ret) and Army Col. Paris Davis (ret) at the dedication of the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke. Davis and McDaniel, both Alexandria residents, are highly decorated Vietnam War veterans.



Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin, center, is joined by Capt. Eugene “Red” McDaniel, Col. Paris Davis, Commissioner for Virginia Department of Veterans Services Daniel Gade and other dignitaries in preparing to cut the ribbon on the renamed Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Capt. Eugene “Red” McDaniel, left, and Col. Paris Davis stand beneath the new sign in their honor at the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Gov. Glenn Youngkin addresses the crowd at the renaming of the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



The Virginia Military Institute Honor Guard presents the colors at the Dec. 12 Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center renaming ceremony in Roanoke.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN  
GAZETTE PACKET

Two of Alexandria’s most decorated Vietnam veterans — Navy Capt. Eugene “Red” McDaniel and Medal of Honor recipient Army Col. Paris Davis — were honored by Gov. Glenn Youngkin as the Virginia Veterans Care Center was renamed the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.

“Hero is a word that is oftentimes overused but today is a word that is wholly inadequate to describe the men that this beautiful facility going forward will be

named,” Youngkin said in addressing the crowd. “Today we honor two incredible souls who across war and conflict defined victory with their unwavering courage.”

Youngkin and other state and local officials, including Mount Vernon resident and Commissioner of Virginia Department of Veterans Services Daniel Gade, were on hand to cut the ribbon officially renaming the center that was first opened in 1992.

“Virginia’s veterans landed on D-Day, they fought in the trenches of Korea, the jungles and camps of Vietnam and the sands of Iraq,” said Gade, a disabled veteran of the war in Iraq. “Today we are

gathered to honor two very special Virginia veterans. I feel a special kinship with them as soldiers wounded in battle share a fellowship of suffering that the uninitiated cannot comprehend.”

Gade shared the heroic stories of Medal of Honor recipient Davis and Vietnam War POW McDaniel, his voice breaking as he recalled their gallantry in combat.

“If one hero wasn’t enough, today we honor two,” Gade said. “My admiration for Eugene ‘Red’ McDaniel goes back to when a 12-year-old me read, read again and reread his book Scars and Stripes. Those stories stuck with  
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Daniel Gade, Commissioner for Virginia Department of Veterans Services and a resident of the Mount Vernon area, speaks at the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



# Youngkin Honors Local Vietnam Heroes Davis and McDaniel

FROM PAGE 3

me and have inspired me for nearly 40 years. And in my own darkest hour, when I was maimed and broken in war, I turned to your inspiration.

I prayed with the same fervency to the same great God. I was able to bear up under unspeakable pain because you'd done it before me. Men like you and Col. Davis inspired me then and you inspire me now and it is our honor to name this care center after you."

Youngkin read the Medal of Honor citation for Davis, saying "Heroes like Col. Paris D. Davis remind us that it takes just one to stand, one to lead through service, one whose deeds inspire many."

Said Davis in his remarks, "The name of the veterans center is not about me. It is about the commitment we have shared to support our veterans. This center is a testament to the value we hold dear, the love that we have for America and those who serve to protect our country and who have dedicated their lives to the principle of duty and honor."

In addition to the ribbon cutting, the ceremony featured the presentation of plaques to Davis and McDaniel.

"I am humbled and honored at such a high level for this building to be named after me," McDaniel said. "If I had known 50 years ago when I ejected into the jungles of North Vietnam that God was going to use my story in these ways it would have been a much easier ride.

Thank you Governor Youngkin and Commissioner Gade, a man who has given much more than I for his country."

Operated by the Virginia Department of Veteran Services, the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center has 224 beds and provides



Gov. Glenn Youngkin, right, congratulates Col. Paris Davis at the renaming ceremony of the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel gives an interview after the renaming of the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Regan Davis Hopper with her father Col. Paris Davis Dec. 12 in Roanoke.

PHOTOS BY JEANNE THEISSMANN/GAZETTE PACKET



Col. Paris Davis gives media interviews following the renaming of the Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel poses for a photo with members of the VMI Honor Guard Dec. 12 in Roanoke.

on-site laboratory work, X-rays, physical therapy, podiatry care and many other health care services. It is located next door to the Salem Veterans Affairs Medical Center. "Colonel Davis, Captain McDaniel

thank you for loving our country," Youngkin said. "Thank you for demonstrating what selfless ser-

vice means. And thank you again for reminding all of us that freedom is not free."



Commissioner Daniel Gade, center, poses with fellow Alexandria residents Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel and Col. Paris Davis Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Col. Paris Davis poses for a photo with staff at the newly renamed Davis and McDaniel Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel with members of his family Dec. 12 in Roanoke.



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JUNE 22, 2023



PHOTO BY MCARTHUR MYERS

## Celebrating Juneteenth

The George Washington Masonic National Memorial lights up the sky over Alexandria in recognition of Juneteenth, marking the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. The troops' arrival came two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and officially became a federal holiday in 2021.

## Hometown Hero

**Paris Davis honored by local community.**

By JEANNE THEISMANN  
GAZETTE PACKET

**R**etired Army Colonel Paris Davis, the nation's most recent recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, was celebrated at a reception in his honor June 17 at the Capt. Rocky Versace Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza in Del Ray.

The event took place 58 years to

the day that a wounded and bloodied Davis, then a Special Forces captain, twice refused orders to quit the battlefield of Bong Son until he had saved multiple wounded teammates in a brutal 19-hour hand to hand battle with a Viet Cong battalion. Due to his heroics, Davis's entire team survived the battle.

President Joe Biden presented Davis, a longtime Alexandria resident, with the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony March 3. Davis was also inducted into the Pentagon Hall of Heroes.

Retired Navy Captain Eugene "Red" McDaniel, who spent six years

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Medal of Honor recipient Col. Paris Davis (ret), left, is presented with a proclamation from the City of Alexandria by Daniel Gade, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, June 17 at the Capt. Rocky Versace Vietnam Memorial Plaza in Del Ray.



PHOTOS BY MARCEL BASSETT/APD

Medal of Honor recipient Paris Davis, second from right, is congratulated by Police Chief Don Hayes, former Mayor Allison Silberberg and Sheriff Sean Casey at a reception in Davis' honor June 17 at the Mount Vernon Recreation Center.



# Hometown Hero

**“I am overwhelmed by the outpouring of appreciation and gratitude that everyone has shown me here today.”**

— Medal of Honor recipient Paris Davis

FROM PAGE 1

as a POW in Vietnam, gave remarks, noting that as a Vietnam soldier at the height of the conflict, Davis never received the welcome home and accolades he and his men deserved.

“Those of us released in 1973 came home to a hero’s welcome,” McDaniel said. “Col. Davis never knew that feeling of appreciation for the service and sacrifice he had given for his country. This recognition, this Medal of Honor, is long overdue.”

A proclamation from the City of Alexandria was read on behalf of Mayor Justin Wilson and members of City Council, who were unable to attend due to a council meeting at City Hall. Daniel Gade, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, made the presentation to Davis.

Fellow Vietnam Medal of Honor recipient Brian Thacker traveled

from his home in Maryland to meet Davis and visit the Capt. Rocky Versace Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza. Versace, who grew up just blocks from the Plaza that now bears his name, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in 2002 for heroism during his time in captivity. It was the first time an Army POW had been awarded the nation’s highest honor for actions in captivity.

Davis and Thacker paid their respects to Versace, whose remains have never been accounted for, with a salute at the Gold Star bearing his name.

A highly decorated veteran who served 26 years in the U.S. Army, Davis was one of the first African Americans to lead a Special Forces team in combat.

“There were not many African Americans in Special Forces,” Davis said. “I had a lot of people say to me ‘Are you sure you want to go into



Medal of Honor recipient Col. Paris Davis (ret), center, is congratulated by members of American Legion Post 24 June 17 after being presented with a lifetime honorary membership to the American Legion.

Special Forces? I don’t see a lot of people who look like you there.’ But

I was inspired by President Kennedy, who created the Special Forces, and wanted to be a part of it. I knew what I was getting into.”

In attendance at the reception were Alexandria Police Chief Don Hayes, Sheriff Sean Casey, former Mayor Allison Silberberg, and Jerry Krueger, Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 609.

Mike Mixon, Commander of American Legion Post 24, was joined by several Legion members in a pre-

sentation to Davis of an honorary lifetime membership to Post 24.

Now 84 years old, Davis retired as a colonel in 1985. For 30 years, he published the Metro Herald, an African American newspaper that was headquartered on North Washington Street.

“This is a very special day,” Davis said. “I am overwhelmed by the outpouring of appreciation and gratitude that everyone has shown me here today.”



Vietnam POW Capt. Eugene “Red” McDaniel gives remarks at the June 17 ceremony honoring Medal of Honor recipient Paris Davis.



Special Forces veterans Ray Oden and Jim Hooker attend the June 17 ceremony honoring Medal of Honor recipient Paris Davis.



Kevin Rue, left, of the Friends of Rocky Versace, gives a tour of Vietnam War memorabilia to Col. Paris Davis June 17 at the Mount Vernon Recreation Center.



Mount Vernon Recreation Center director Elsie Akinbobola, second from left, gathers with recreation center staff for a photo with Medal of Honor recipients Brian Thacker, left, and Paris Davis, fourth from right, at the Capt. Rocky Versace Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza in Del Ray.



Medal of Honor recipients Brian Thacker, left, and Paris Davis, salute the Gold Star of Humbert “Rocky” Versace June 17 in Del Ray. Versace received the Medal of Honor posthumously in 2002 for his heroics in Vietnam.

PHOTOS BY MARCEL BASSETT/APD