

American Soldier Network and Toyota Join Forces to Honor Decorated Veteran

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“...Heroism is the dazzling and glorious concentration of courage.” – *Henri Frédéric Amiel*

Courage is something Congressional Medal of Honor recipient John Philip Baca has often displayed, whether fighting for freedom overseas or fighting for issues facing fellow veterans in the U.S.

On Feb. 10, 1970, U.S. Army soldier Baca was stationed in Vietnam, serving on a recoilless rifle team in Phuoc Long Province. When the lead platoon of his company was ambushed, Baca led his team forward through intense fire.

In the words of his Medal of Honor citation, Baca "unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own safety" covered a grenade tossed into the group with his helmet and his own body, smothering the blast and saving eight fellow soldiers from severe injury or death.

Acts of courage and heroism are essential to military personnel at home and in the theater of war. American Soldier Network (ASN) learned of Baca and reached out to Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer, who then contacted Toyota, a company he partners with.

Baca was in need of transportation for himself and his service dog JoJo. After Meyer introduced ASN to Toyota, they made plans to surprise Baca with a Platinum edition Toyota Tundra. They presented it during the Forgotten Sons "Ride to Live" fundraising motorcycle ride to raise awareness and prevent soldier/veteran suicide event at the Elks Lodge in Oceanside, Calif.

Toyota Veterans Association President Michael Smith, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps in both Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, presented the "ride" – complete with a service agreement, pre-paid maintenance plan and \$3,500 in gas cards – to Baca, enabling him to continue his work with veteran and advocacy groups like ASN.

"As a veteran myself, I can truly understand the many perils that John and his fellow troops endured defending our nation," said Smith. "It gives me great pleasure to present him with this Tundra on behalf of Toyota and our team members across America as just a small token of our gratitude to him for his service."

After honoring Baca with the vehicle, Toyota also announced that it is donating \$5,000 to ASN, to help defray the costs of assisting other veterans who are in need of help.

Baca also received a year's supply of dog food and dog travel accessories for JoJo – thanks to Hills Dog Food, Purina Dog Food and MWI Animal Health – at the fundraiser, which supports the ASN efforts to raise awareness and prevent the tragic military/suicide epidemic.

"To be a part of veterans pulling together to not only honor one of their own, but to dramatically change his life for the better was truly magical," said Annie Nelson, founder of ASN. "We at ASN work tirelessly to impact the lives of our heroes here at home daily. To watch companies like Toyota USA, Hills, Purina, MWI Animal Health and the Nice Guys stand with us in our efforts reaffirms our belief we all must do what we can to ensure our veterans are appreciated, protected and never ever forgotten. We all must do this together!"