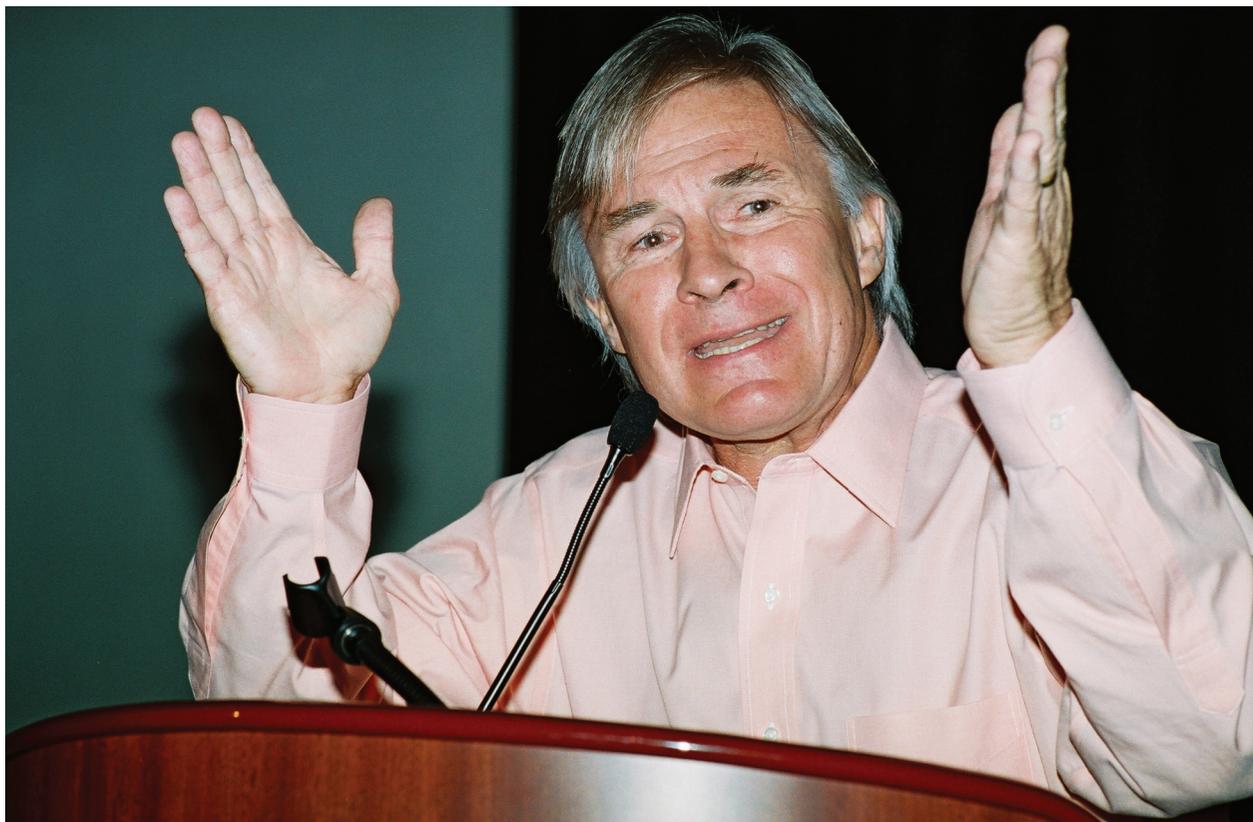




..... PARTING SHOT



MICHAEL KEATING

Medal of Honor recipient and VVA member Buddy Bucha addresses VVA's 2004 Nashville Leadership Conference. Before speaking on veterans advocacy or political matters, Bucha makes a point of removing the medal.

The Highest Military Award

BY MARC LEEPSON

Late in 1861, the first year of the Civil War, Congress passed a law mandating new procedures for the U.S. Navy. One section of the law authorized the secretary of the Navy to “cause two hundred ‘medals of honor’ to be prepared,” to be “bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen, and marines as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other seamanlike qualities during the present war.”

Soon thereafter, Congress authorized the President “in the name of Congress,” to award “two thousand ‘medals of honor’” to Army “non-commissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldier-like qualities, during the present insurrection.”

Later legislation expanded the award to all ranks in all the military services. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton pre-

sented the first Medals of Honor (often erroneously called the “Congressional Medal of Honor”) in March 1863.

Since then, more than 3,400 Medals of Honor—the highest military award for those who distinguish themselves “through conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty” while engaged in military action—have been awarded.

Sixty-four went to Union soldiers who fought at the three-day, July 1863, Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War. Twenty-seven Marines and Navy sailors who fought at the two-month-long Battle of Iwo Jima in March 1945 during World War II received the award. A total of 472 Medals of Honor were awarded to those who fought in World War II.

When former Green Beret Capt. Mike Rose received the Medal of Honor at the White House on October 23 last year, he became the 262nd American who served in the Vietnam War to receive the nation’s highest military award. ■