

PAUL W. BUCHA Captain, U.S. Army Company D, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry, 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division



A high school all-American swimmer in the early 1960s, Paul Bucha was offered athletic scholarships from schools such as Yale and Indiana University, but he chose West Point instead. After graduation, he got an MBA from Stanford University, then reported to Fort Campbell. In 1967, he arrived in Vietnam with the 187th Infantry as a captain in charge of an infantry company.

On March 16, 1968, as part of the U.S. forces' effort to push the enemy away from Saigon after the Tet Offensive, Bucha's 89-man company was inserted by helicopter into a suspected North Vietnamese stronghold southwest of Phuoc Vinh. For the next two days, the unit destroyed enemy fortifications and base camps and eliminated scattered resistance. Late in the afternoon of March 18, the lead element of the company, about 12 men, exchanged fire with enemy soldiers. Then suddenly the entire area exploded with heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and claymore mines, and the 12 men were immediately pinned down.

Realizing that his company had stumbled upon an entire North Vietnamese Army battalion bivouacked for the night, Bucha began to organize a defense to protect the men who were cut off. Crawling toward them through heavy fire, he spotted an enemy soldier whose machine gun was perched in the Y of a tree. He killed the soldier with his rifle and destroyed the bunker behind him with a grenade. As the North Vietnamese attacked repeatedly, he ordered a withdrawal and called for a platoon to evacuate the wounded. But the platoon was cut off as it was heading to a medevac landing zone.

As darkness fell, a grim thought passed through Bucha's mind: I don't even know the name of this place. What a godforsaken place to die. Just then one of his men ran by, calling out enthusiastically, "We're really kicking some tail, aren't we, captain?" The comment was so out of sync with what he had been thinking that Bucha laughed out loud and refocused on the struggle ahead.

Over the next few hours, everything unfolded in slow motion. Bucha was constantly on the move, encouraging his men, and shoring up the line of defense while directing artillery and helicopter gunship fire on the North Vietnamese. He did everything he could think of to make the enemy believe that his vastly outnumbered force was larger than it was — lobbing grenades at set times from different positions, spreading the firing patterns along the edges of his perimeter. At one point, with sniper fire whizzing around him and North Vietnamese soldiers so close that he could hear their conversation, he used flashlights to direct the evacuation of three air-ambulance loads of wounded, despite the fact that this illuminated him in the dark. At daybreak, he was able to lead a rescue party to the men who had been cut off from the company all night.

By then, the North Vietnamese had melted away. They took most of their dead with them, but more than 150 bodies remained behind on the battlefield. After Bucha's dead and wounded had been medevaced out, he loaded the rest of his company, about 40 men, onto helicopters and returned to Phuoc Vinh.

In April 1970, at the end of his Vietnam tour, Bucha returned to West Point to teach an accounting course he had designed. After one of his classes, he found a telephone message from Washington. Returning the phone call, he was informed that he had been awarded the Medal of Honor. He received it on May 14 from President Richard Nixon.

Medal of Honor

BUCHA, PAUL WILLIAM

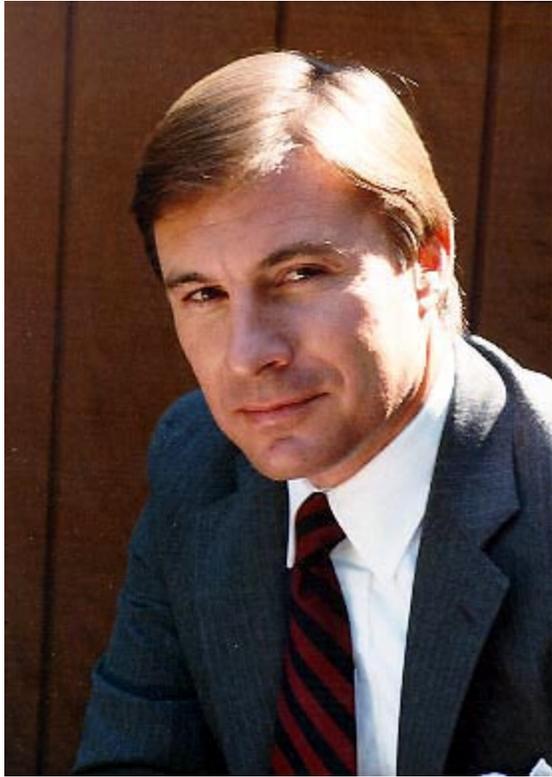
Rank and organization: Captain, U.S. Army, Company D, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division

Place and date: Near Phuoc Vinh, Binh Duong Province, Republic of Vietnam, 16-19 March 1968

Entered service at: U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York

Born: 1 August 1943, Washington, D.C.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Bucha distinguished himself while serving as commanding officer, Company D, on a reconnaissance-in-force mission against enemy forces near Phuoc Vinh. The company was inserted by helicopter into the suspected enemy stronghold to locate and destroy the enemy. During this period Capt. Bucha aggressively and courageously led his men in the destruction of enemy fortifications and base areas and eliminated scattered resistance impeding the advance of the company. On 18 March while advancing to contact, the lead elements of the company became engaged by the heavy automatic weapon, heavy machine gun, rocket propelled grenade, claymore mine and small-arms fire of an estimated battalion-size force. Capt. Bucha, with complete disregard for his safety, moved to the threatened area to direct the defense and ordered reinforcements to the aid of the lead element. Seeing that his men were pinned down by heavy machine gun fire from a concealed bunker located some 40 meters to the front of the positions, Capt. Bucha crawled through the hail of fire to singlehandedly destroy the bunker with grenades. During this heroic action Capt. Bucha received a painful shrapnel wound. Returning to the perimeter, he observed that his unit could not hold its position and repel the human wave assaults launched by the determined enemy. Capt. Bucha ordered the withdrawal of the unit elements and covered the withdrawal to positions of a company perimeter from which he could direct fire upon the charging enemy. When 1 friendly element retrieving casualties was ambushed and cut off from the perimeter, Capt. Bucha ordered them to feign death and he directed artillery fire around them. During the night Capt. Bucha moved throughout the position, distributing ammunition, providing encouragement and insuring the integrity of the defense. He directed artillery, helicopter gunship and Air Force gunship fire on the enemy strong points and attacking forces, marking the positions with smoke grenades. Using flashlights in complete view of enemy snipers, he directed the medical evacuation of 3 air-ambulance loads of seriously wounded personnel and the helicopter supply of his company. At daybreak Capt. Bucha led a rescue party to recover the dead and wounded members of the ambushed element. During the period of intensive combat, Capt. Bucha, by his extraordinary heroism, inspirational example, outstanding leadership and professional competence, led his company in the decimation of a superior enemy force which left 156 dead on the battlefield. His bravery and gallantry at the risk of his life are in the highest traditions of the military service, Capt. Bucha has reflected great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.



Testimony of

Paul Bucha - President - Congressional Medal of Honor Society

Before the Subcommittee on Immigration Committee on the Judiciary

United States Senate Concerning

"The Contribution of Immigrants to America's Armed Forces"

May 26, 1999, 10 a.m.

My name is Paul Bucha, President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, and I have asked Charles MacGillivray, a past president of the society, to present my testimony. I want to thank you Senator Abraham for holding this hearing and, more importantly, for displaying leadership on the immigration issue and reminding us of America's great tradition as a nation of immigrants.

Let me state my position clearly: All of us owe our freedom and our prosperity to the sacrifices of immigrants who gave of themselves so that we might have more. We are fortunate and we are forever indebted to those who have gone before.

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the U.S. Armed Services. Generally presented to its recipient by the President in the name of Congress, it is often called the Congressional Medal of Honor. In 1946, the Medal of Honor Society was formed to perpetuate and uphold the integrity of the Medal of Honor and to help its recipients. In 1957, Congress passed legislation, later signed by President Eisenhower, that incorporated the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

A review of the records shows that 715 of the 3,410 Congressional Medal of Honor recipients in America's history -- more than 20 percent -- have been immigrants. I would like to share the stories of some of these individuals so the committee can better understand the sacrifices made by these and other immigrants.

Lewis Albanese, an immigrant from Italy served during the Vietnam War as a private first class in the U.S. Army. On December 1, 1966, Albanese's platoon advanced through dense terrain. At close range, enemy soldiers fired automatic weapons. Albanese was assigned the task of providing security for the platoon's left flank so it could move forward.

Suddenly, an enemy in a concealed ditch opened fire on the left flank. Realizing his fellow soldiers were in danger, Albanese fixed his bayonet, plunged into the ditch and silenced the sniper fire. This allowed the platoon to advance in safety toward the main enemy position.

The ditch that Lewis Albanese had entered was filled with a complex of defenses designed to inflict heavy damage on any who attacked the main position. The other members of the platoon heard heavy firing from the ditch and some of them saw what happened next: Albanese moved 100 meters along the trench and killed six snipers, each of whom were armed with automatic weapons. But soon, Albanese, out of ammunition, was forced to engage in hand-to-hand combat with North Vietnamese soldiers. He killed two of them. But he was mortally wounded in the attack.

"His unparalleled action saved the lives of many members of his platoon who otherwise would have fallen to the sniper fire," reads the official citation. "Private First Class Albanese's extraordinary heroism and supreme dedication to his comrades were commensurate with the finest traditions of the military service and remain a tribute to himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army." Lewis Albanese was 20 years old.

Mexican-born immigrant Marcario Garcia was acting squad leader of Company B (22nd Infantry) near Grosshau, Germany during World War II. Garcia was wounded and in pain as he found his company pinned down by the heavy machine gun fire of Nazi troops and by an artillery and mortar barrage. Garcia crawled forward up to one of the enemy's positions. He lobbed hand grenades into the enemy's emplacement, singlehandedly assaulted the position, and destroyed the gun, killing three German soldiers.

Shortly after returning to his company, another German machine gun started firing. Garcia returned to the German position and again singlehandedly stormed the enemy, destroying the gun, killing three more German soldiers, and capturing four prisoners.

Finally, Lieutenant John Koelsch was a London-born immigrant who flew a helicopter as part of a Navy helicopter rescue unit during the Korean War. On July 3, 1951, he received word that the North Koreans had shot down a U.S. marine aviator and had him trapped deep inside hostile territory. The terrain was mountainous and it was growing dark. John Koelsch volunteered to rescue him.

Koelsch's aircraft was unarmed and due to the overcast and low altitude he flew without a fighter escort. He drew enemy fire as he descended beneath the clouds to search for the downed aviator.

After being hit, Koelsch kept flying until he located the downed pilot, who had suffered serious burns. While the injured pilot was being hoisted up, a burst of enemy fire hit the helicopter, causing it to crash into the side of the mountain. Koelsch helped his crew and the downed pilot out of the wreckage, and led the men out of the area just ahead of the enemy troops. With Koelsch leading them, they spent nine days on the run evading the North Koreans and caring for the burned pilot. Finally, the North Koreans captured Koelsch and his men.

"His great personal valor and heroic spirit of self-sacrifice throughout sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service," his citation for the Medal of Honor reads. That self-sacrifice, the citation notes, included the inspiration of other prisoners of war, for during the interrogation he "refused to aid his captors in any manner" and died in the hands of the North Koreans.

These and other immigrant Medal of Honor recipients tell the story not only of America's wars but of America's people. After all, we must never forget that all of us are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants.

Tens of thousands of immigrants and hundreds of thousands of the descendants of immigrants have died in combat fighting for America. I put to you that there is a standard, a basic standard, by which to judge whether America is correct to maintain a generous legal immigration policy: Have immigrants and their children and grandchildren been willing to fight and die for the United States of America? The answer -- right up to the present day -- remains a resounding "yes." Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for receiving my testimony.