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Senate

MASTER SERGEANT WOODROW WILSON KEEBLE

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, few Americans will recognize MSG Woodrow Wilson Keeble's name, but he was an American hero who served in two wars and who deserves our Nation's most prestigious recognition.

I first became aware of Master Sergeant Keeble's bravery in 2002 after being contacted by members of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe who were requesting that his Distinguished Service Cross be upgraded to the Congressional Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor is our Nation's highest military honor, and while it is awarded on behalf of Congress, the Department of Defense determines the qualifications and eligibility for the decoration.

Master Sergeant Keeble, a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, was an Army veteran of both World War II and the Korean War. For his service, he was awarded the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, and the Distinguished Service Cross.

The last decoration was awarded for his actions near Kumsong, North Korea in October 1951. After many days of fighting in the bitter cold, and though he was wounded, Master Sergeant Keeble single handedly took out three enemy machine gun emplacements.

The first hand accounts of his actions that day read like something out of an old Hollywood movie. What he did was real, and his bravery in the face of enemy fire was so remarkable that the men in his company twice submitted recommendations that he receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. In both cases, the recommendation was lost.

Like so many veterans, Master Sergeant Keeble returned home after the war a humble man, not interested in pursuing medals or personal honors.

He died in 1982, and without the dedicated effort of his family and fellow veterans, most of us would have never had the opportunity to learn about Master Sergeant Keeble. Today, there is an ongoing effort to document his actions through the eyewitness testimony of those veterans who served with him. This is a valuable effort and will help preserve an important part of our Nation's history.

After first hearing in 2002 of his heroic actions, I contacted the Secretary of the Army to request a review of Master Sergeant Keeble's case. Based on an affidavit from a member of the company that the original recommendations for the Medal of Honor had been lost, I asked the Secretary to waive the normal 3-year statute of limitations requirement for consideration of the Medal of Honor.

Since that time, I have been in close contact with the Army. The recommendation to posthumously award the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Keeble has been reviewed by an Army Decorations Board, a Senior Army Decorations Board, and now awaits final action by the Secretary of the Army. At this point, I do not know if the Secretary's decision will be positive or negative, but I remain in contact with his office almost every month as I have for the past 4 years.

While all of us who care about this case are frustrated by the amount of time this has taken, the thorough review process is an indication of the importance of the Medal of Honor and the seriousness of this decision.

As more people learn about Master Sergeant Keeble's story, more people are joining in the effort to pay tribute to his service. While I do not know what the Army's ultimate decision will be in this case, I can think of no one more deserving of this honor than Master Sergeant Keeble.