

Navy Band Southeast Meets Living American Heroes

By Musician 3rd Class Diane Potts

“Valor is a gift. Those having it never know for sure if they have it till the test comes. And those having it in one test never know for sure if they will have it when the next test comes.”

-Carl Sandburg

On July 2, 2011, Navy Band Southeast’s (NBSE) ceremonial band, led by Senior Chief Musician Kenny Oliver, performed the national anthem for the Daytona Coke Zero 400 NASCAR race at the Daytona Motor Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla.

According to a post by NASCAR Blogger Jeff Gluck, NASCAR tracks are beginning to use military-related groups as opposed to a pop artist after a series of sub-par performances of the anthem in various sporting events last year. The performance on July 2 was nationally televised with six million viewers and a live audience exceeding 100,000 spectators.

After their performance, members of NBSE met some of this nation’s greatest heroes: recipients of the Medal of Honor – the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force, presented by the president in the name of Congress to an individual serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

The Medal of Honor recipients present at the race were U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness, U.S. Army Capt. Harold Fritz, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jon Caviani, and U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Don Jenkins – all of whom served in Vietnam.

Dr. Hal Kushner, a former Vietnam POW also present at the race, described the Medal of Honor as a “mark of the highest brand of courage.”

Members of NBSE were honored to meet living American heroes.

“When I shook these heroes’ hands, I remembered that they are people who did extraordinary things with no regard for their own safety or well being,” Musician 3rd Class Nathan Helvey said. “And then I remembered that they did it so maybe we wouldn’t have to. They are true American heroes.”

Medal of Honor recipients also made an impression on Musician 2nd Class Justin Albritton. “Meeting these American heroes helps us all remember the great sacrifice, courage, and the resolve of the American people when faced with insurmountable odds.”

Since 1861, 3,456 individuals have received the Medal of Honor, with only 85 still living.



Musicians of Navy Band Southeast proudly pose with Medal of Honor Recipient, Staff Sgt. Don Jenkins