

**MEMORIAL DAY 2017**  
**REMEMBERING THE 1354 COMBAT MEDICS WHO DIED IN VIETNAM**  
FOR THEIR SUPREME SACRIFICE AND COURAGEOUS EFFORTS TO SAVE LIVES AND MINIMIZE HUMAN SUFFERING  
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“FOR CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY AND INTREPIDITY IN ACTION  
AT THE RISK OF HIS OWN LIFE ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY”



**KENNETH MICHAEL KAYS**

*Fairfield, IL 09/22/1949 – 11/29/1991 Age 42*  
COMBAT MEDIC, D CO, 1<sup>ST</sup> BN 506<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY, 101<sup>ST</sup> ABN DIV, USARV

20 year old Ken Kays, an Illinois country boy who flunked out of college, was drafted for military service in October 1969. He petitioned for Conscientious Objector status but was denied. PVT Kays was sent to Vietnam as a field medic in April 1970. On May 7, 1970, after only 17 days in Vietnam, his heroic lifesaving efforts, during a brutal, four hour firefight with the NVA, earned him both the Distinguished Service Cross and the Congressional Medal of Honor. After returning home, Kays struggled to reconcile his antiwar beliefs with the events of that horrific night. Those haunting memories tormented him and took a toll on his psyche. His life spiraled out of control into the dark abyss of PTSD.\*

Kenneth Michael Kays committed suicide on November 29, 1991.  
*“I’ve seen too much and been too far to really love you when you’re near,  
For horrible visions haunt my mind, of bloody death and unchained fear.”*  
The opening stanza of a poem written by Ken Kays (1971)

In the late 1960’s the Vietnam War and the dreaded military draft hovered like a bad dream over America. The antiwar and counter culture movements gave rise to an increase in the number of applications for *Conscientious Objector (CO)* status. Each local military draft board had the authority to approve or deny requests for reclassification. A CO applicant was required to submit a written petition and then appear before the board to defend their convictions. Religious beliefs and secular pacifism were the reasons *Conscientious Objectors* might be reclassified as either: *I-A-O* (willing to serve in a noncombatant role) or *I-O* (not willing to assist the military in any capacity but agreeable to mandatory alternative service for 2 years). If reclassification to CO status was denied, the registrant was obligated to serve in the Military for two years, likely as a field medic and not be required to carry a gun (The Vietnam War was the first war in which US field medics carried weapons) otherwise he would face a two year prison sentence.

17 US Military Medical personnel serving in Vietnam were awarded the *Congressional Medal of Honor*. Medic, CPL Thomas W. Bennett (KIA Feb. 11, 1969) was the only Vietnam Medal of Honor recipient who was officially classified as a Conscientious Objector *I-A-O*. Medic, SPC4 Joseph G. La Pointe Jr (KIA June 2, 1969), a “self-declared” CO, was also awarded the Medal of Honor. *To read the citation detailing the heroic actions of Kenneth Kays refer to side two or visit: [www.history.army.mil/moh/vietnam-a-l.html](http://www.history.army.mil/moh/vietnam-a-l.html)*

PTSD became an approved medical diagnosis in 1980 and is recognized today as a psychobiological mental disorder. The number of US Military Veterans receiving PTSD treatment has doubled in the last 10 years. Ravaged by mental and physical illnesses, 22 US Veterans commit suicide every day and there are an estimated 30 cases of non-fatal suicide attempts daily. [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov); [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

**RAISING AWARENESS OF THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE**

259 VIETNAM VETERANS WERE AWARDED THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR. 163 WERE POSTHUMOUS AWARDS.

\* *TROUBLED HERO: A Medal of Honor, Vietnam, and the War at Home* by Randy K Mills © 2006 Indiana University Press