

Maui Guard Armory renamed for Medal of Honor Hero

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An armory memorialization ceremony was held at the Hawaii Army National Guard's Puunene Armory on Maui, Hawaii on Oct. 13, 2017. The dedication ceremony honored Private First Class Anthony T. Kahoohanohano for his selfless service during the Korean War.

About 200 people attended the ceremony, including a large number from the Kahoohanohano family, members from Maui's Korean War Veteran's Association, Maui elected officials, Hawaii National Guardsmen, and friends of the family. The ceremony was short, but the new sign "PFC Anthony T. Kahoohanohano Armory" and a bronze plaque describing the actions that earned him the Medal of Honor, will last forever.

A native of Maui, Pfc. Kahoohanohano, was one of six brothers, all who served in the U.S. military. There is also a deep tie to the Hawaii Army National Guard.

"Anthony first joined the Hawaii Army National Guard and he was not the only one," said Pfc. Kahoohanohano's nephew, George Kahoohanohano. "My father Able, Uncles David and Eugene, also myself, my brothers Able Jr., and Michael were all either with the Headquarters, Headquarters Company at the old Wailuku armory, or Charlie Co. from the 2nd Battalion, 299th Infantry, at the old Kahului Armory."

Pfc. Kahoohanohano transitioned from the Guard to the active Army and soon found himself on the front lines of the Korean War. He was assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. On August 26, 1951, the 7th Infantry Division launched an operation to secure a series of hills near the small village of Chup'a-ri, Korea. Kahoohanohano's battalion was tasked to assault Hill 682, which it secured on August 30, 1951.

On September 1, 1951, twenty-one year old Anthony T. Kahoohanohano was on the front lines of the Korean War. Prior to that day, he was undoubtedly similar to most young men his age. Had it not been for the events of September 1, 1951, the majority of us most likely would never hear about the life of Anthony T.

Kahoohanohano. Yet with one faithful act of courage and ultimate sacrifice, his memory transcended the bounds of mortality, yet his story was almost never told.

Kahoohanohano was in charge of a machine-gun squad supporting defensive positions of another company within his battalion when a numerically superior enemy force launched a fierce attack. The overwhelming numbers of the enemy forced his squad to execute a limited withdrawal. As the Soldiers fell back,

Kahoohanohano ordered his squad to take up a more defensible position and provide covering fire for the friendly force.

After relocating his squad, Kahoohanohano, despite being wounded in the shoulder during initial attack, gathered a supply of grenades and ammunition, and returned to his original position to face the ranks of the onrushing enemy. As enemy troops concentrated their strength against his emplacement in an effort to overrun it, Kahoohanohano continued to deliver accurate fire into the ranks of the attacking enemy. When his ammunition ran out, he continued to fight the enemy hand-to-hand using his entrenching tool until he was killed.

For his actions at the Battle of Chup'a-ri, Kahoohanohano was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the United States Army's second highest military decoration. The medal was presented to his mother in 1952 on Maui. With the award's presentation, the memory of his heroic actions were relegated to the hearts of family and friends, where it remained for nearly fifty years.

In the late 1990's, Kahoohanohano's brother, Abel Kahoohanohano, Sr., began an effort to have his brother's Distinguished Service Cross upgraded. Abel's son George then took up the cause after his father's death. After an unsuccessful Medal of Honor Nomination in 2001, the family sought the help of Senator Daniel Akaka. Akaka nominated Kahoohanohano for the medal again, and in 2009 was informed by the Secretary of the Army Pete Geren that the request had been approved.

A provision making the upgrade official was included in the 2010 Defense Authorization Act, which President Barack Obama signed into law on October 28, 2009. The Medal of Honor was formally presented to the Kahoohanohano family at a White House Ceremony on May 2, 2011. However, this time, unlike 1952, the sacrifice of this Hawaii hero would not be allowed to fade.

In his opening remarks at the memorialization ceremony, the Adjutant General of the Hawaii National Guard, Maj. Gen. Joe Logan, stressed the honor he felt being able to recognize a "family of patriotic Hawaiians," who have given so much to their community and country.

"The Hawaii Army National Guard will bestow a most fitting acknowledgement to our hero, having the Puunene armory to now bear his name," Logan said. "Today, the Hawaii National Guard is humbled for such an honor. Thank you Pfc. Kahoohanohano for your selfless service and making that ultimate sacrifice and mahalo to the Kahoohanohano ohana who served their state and nation."

For the family, the memorialization ceremony was about something more. George Kahoohanohano, who continued his father's mission, provided the keynote address during the ceremony.

"Kahoohanohano means 'to make proud'", Kahoohanohano said. "He has lived up to his name. In his sacrifice, he has made us all proud. Not only the Kahoohanohano ohana, but the State of Hawaii and need I say, the United States of America."

The Armory Memorialization Ceremony culminated with the unveiling of a plaque detailing the heroic action of Pfc. Kahoohanohano. Along with the plaque, the family donated a Hawaiian koa tree and shadow box containing all of the service medals, flags and the Medal of Honor, which will be displayed in the armory.

Kahoohanohano elaborated on the significance of the donated koa plant.

"For when it blossoms, the flower is of a red and yellow like the colors of the original patch for the Hawaii Army National Guard," Kahoohanohano said. "Like the name 'koa', Hawaiian for 'warrior', it befits the men and women who serve and are a part of this great unit that will train here."

Those three items, although small reminders of a hero's ultimate sacrifice, will inspire generations of future Hawaii Army National Guard Soldiers, thus ensuring a Hawaiian hero is forever honored.

"'Gratitude's' to each and every one of you for acknowledging this spirit, in this moment in time," Kahoohanohano said. "The naming of this Hawaii Army National Guard armory, the only one left on the island of Maui, is even more of a special honor for our ohana."