

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #23: Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris

[Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris](#), born January 7, 1942, in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, grew up in a large family and rural community with limited economic opportunities. In 1959, he joined the Oklahoma Army National Guard before transitioning to active-duty service, eventually becoming one of the first U.S. soldiers to earn the elite [Green Beret](#) in 1961. His military career included multiple deployments, including two tours in the [Vietnam War](#), and spanned more than two decades until his retirement in 1985. Morris is best known for his extraordinary heroism during a mission in Vietnam on September 17, 1969. When a fellow team commander was killed near a hostile bunker, Morris led a small group across enemy lines to recover the soldier's body. Under intense fire, both men accompanying him were wounded, but he assisted them back to safety before charging forward alone. Armed with grenades, he destroyed multiple enemy bunkers and retrieved his fallen comrade. Despite being shot three times, he continued fighting and refused to stop until he reached friendly lines. His actions saved lives and protected sensitive military information. Although initially recognized with the [Distinguished Service Cross](#) in 1970, Morris's heroism was re-evaluated decades later during a congressionally mandated review aimed at identifying cases in which minority service members may have been overlooked for the [Medal of Honor](#). In 2014, President Barack Obama formally [awarded him the Medal of Honor](#), acknowledging that his bravery had long deserved the nation's highest military distinction. Morris later explained that sharing his story became part of his mission, especially to help young people understand the sacrifices made by service members. Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris's life and actions are significant not only for their military impact but also for the lessons they teach about patriotism, perseverance, and civic responsibility. In 1990, Morris and his family moved to Florida and settled in Brevard County, where they still reside today. A [statue and historical marker](#) to honor Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris are located there. His legacy continues to inspire Americans to value courage, integrity, and the ongoing work of building a more just nation.

- How did Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris's actions reflect the principles of civic responsibility, civic virtue, and the common good?
- What were the reasons for the United States involvement in the Vietnam War?



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