

— CHARLIE JOHNSON —



House Passes Rep. Delgado Bill Making Dutchess County Korean War Hero Charlie Johnson Eligible for Medal of Honor

On Tuesday night, the U.S. House of Representatives passed Representative Antonio Delgado's (NY-19) legislation to make Korean War hero Charles R. Johnson eligible for the Medal of Honor. Johnson, a native of Dutchess County, was overlooked for this decoration when he gave his life in service of his country—an injustice that has taken almost 70 years to correct.

In November, Rep. Delgado secured a commitment from Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to recommend to President Joe Biden that Johnson receive the Medal of Honor. However, Congress must first waive a statutory requirement that the Medal of Honor be awarded within five years of the act of valor it recognizes. [Rep. Delgado's legislation](#) making Johnson eligible to receive the medal beyond the five-year time limit passed the House as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, which now heads to the Senate.

Johnson was killed in action on June 12, 1953 while defending Outpost Harry—a small but strategically important hill in the Choran Valley, about 60 miles north of Seoul, South Korea. During the battle, which saw thousands of enemy troops attempt to seize the outpost, Johnson and many other soldiers in his unit were wounded. Ignoring his own injuries, Johnson treated wounded soldiers, dragged others to safety, and held off the enemy practically single-handedly as his comrades were evacuated. He died doing so. Others in his unit credit him with saving the lives of at least eight men. He is buried in Millbrook, NY.

Despite his bravery, Johnson received no decorations for valor at the time of his death. It was not until 2010 that he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star. According to the testimony of his fellow soldiers, Johnson had been overlooked for this decoration—or any decoration—when he died because he was black, an unfortunately common occurrence during the time. A Pentagon review of PFC Johnson's case was initiated by former Representative Chris Gibson, and the work continued by Representative Delgado.



PFC Charles R. Johnson was killed in action in Korea on June 12, 1953. He was responsible for saving the lives of at least eight other soldiers. At the time of his death, he was overlooked for any decorations for valor. Rep. Delgado's legislation would authorize the president to posthumously award him the Medal of Honor beyond the five-year statutory limit.

“Our extraordinary brother Charlie ‘Buddy’ Johnson died as he had lived—thinking of others before himself. We have grieved his death every day for nearly 70 years, hoping that someday his remarkable act of selflessness, patriotism, and courage would be fully honored and recognized. Even as a child, Charlie’s kindness, generosity, and integrity touched everyone that he met. Despite our grief, we were not surprised that he would give his life to save others. The best heroes are ordinary people who accomplish extraordinary deeds. We would like to thank Congressman Delgado, Secretary Austin, and all of those who made our dream to see our brother, Charles Johnson receive the Congressional Medal of Honor a reality,” **said Ed Johnson, Glenn, and Juanita Mendez Johnson – surviving siblings of Charlie Johnson.**

“Charlie Johnson made the ultimate sacrifice to save the lives of at least eight soldiers,” **said Rep. Delgado.** “His bravery must be recognized by the nation he died defending, and his family deserves for the world to know about his heroism. I thank Secretary Austin for his agreement on this issue and urge the Senate to send this provision to the president’s desk without delay.”

“I’m deeply grateful for Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s and Congressman Antonio Delgado’s strong support and leadership helping advance this cause to posthumously recognize the distinct gallantry of PFC Charlie Johnson, a great American hero and veteran of the Korean War from Dutchess County,” **said Siena College President and former Congressman Chris Gibson.** “It’s long overdue that Johnson’s bravery and supreme sacrifice be recognized with our nation’s highest award—the Medal of Honor—and by including this provision in the NDAA we are one step closer to Presidential approval and ultimately getting this done. Amen.”

AN AMERICAN HERO...AN ARLINGTON LEGACY

The best heroes are ordinary people who accomplish extraordinary deeds – real people our children can emulate. Charlie Johnson, Arlington High School Class of 1951, spent only one year of his high school career at Arlington, yet his life and death has inspired thousands of Arlington students.

During his short tenure at Arlington, Charlie was elected as the senior class vice-president, played football, basketball and baseball, and participated in band and chorus. He was voted by his peers as being the “most friendly,” having the “best physique,” and displaying the “best manners.” He also earned the “Babe Ruth” award for outstanding sportsmanship and fair play.

On June 12, 1953 Charlie Johnson died as he had lived - thinking of others before himself. Charlie was killed in action at Out Post Harry in the hills of Korea while single-handedly saving the lives of nine wounded soldiers, including fellow Arlington graduate Donald Dingee.

Following Charlie's death, while lying in the hospital recovering from his wounds, Don Dingee made a pact with Charlie. "I'm going to have a family big enough for the both of us." And he did. Dingee has seven children and eight grandchildren. One son is now a popular math teacher at Arlington Middle School.

When asked about Charlie, his former classmates had only praise – courageous, generous, selfless, well-mannered, gentle, talented – A HERO.

In May 2001, five Arlington Middle School students conducted a research project on Arlington High School graduates who were killed during American military conflicts. Their project culminated in a Memorial Day presentation at the Dutchess County War Memorial. As the students recited Charlie's story, his siblings learned for the first time how their brother had died and met Donald Dingee.

Since 2001, thousands of Arlington students have learned the story of Charlie Johnson. Arlington High School continues to honor students who emulate eight character traits that Charlie embodied: loyalty, brotherhood, selflessness, courage, compassion, responsibility, patriotism, and integrity.

In 2010, Arlington dedicated Johnson Hall in Charlie's memory and the Wall of Remembrance, which honors Arlington alumni who were killed during the course of military service. There is a plaque and a statue, which was donated by Arlington High School alumni, honoring Charlie. Charlie's family was presented with Charlie's Silver Star during the dedication ceremony, but those who know Charlie, continued to advocate for him to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. We are thrilled to learn that Charlie will now finally receive the recognition that he deserved.