

Memorial Salutes 'Greatest Heroes'

by John Kelly of the Associated Press, May 29, 1999

INDIANAPOLIS - Nearly 100 Medal of Honor winners gathered on Friday for the unveiling of the first monument recognizing the more than 3,400 recipients of America's highest distinction for military valor.

The Medal of Honor Memorial consists of 27 bluish-green, curved glass panels that rise above the canal that splits downtown Indianapolis.

Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial
The veterans got their first chance Friday to walk among those walls, during a dedication ceremony at which speaker after speaker called the former servicemen the greatest heroes of the 20th century.

"We wear these medals, not for ourselves, but for those who served with us and whose work went unseen," said Paul Bucha, who earned the medal while serving in the Army in Vietnam.

As Bucha finished, a curtain of American flags parted so hundreds of onlookers who crammed the canal's banks could see the memorial. Moments later, they crossed the canal to visit the monument and medal-bearers.

Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial
Loved ones scoured the panels for veterans' names. Cries of "Here you are!" echoed. "It's just awesome," said Rick Pittman, a 53-year-old Californian who earned his medal with the Marines in Vietnam.

The panels bear the names of all Medal of Honor winners from 15 military conflicts

dating to the Civil War, with their branch of service and the site of their heroic deeds.

Every night at dusk, a sound system will play recorded stories, narrated by the servicemen who hold the star-shaped medallions.

IPALCO Enterprises, Inc., a holding company for the electrical utility that serves Indianapolis, spent \$2.5 million to build the memorial. It also paid to bring to Indianapolis as many of the 160 surviving Medal of Honor recipients as possible for the dedication over Memorial Day weekend.

"We're just ordinary men and we were very fortunate to do deeds that were seen," said Stephen Gregg, 84, of Bayonne, N.J., who dodged gunfire and grenades to give cover to a medic who rescued seven wounded soldiers in World War II France.

Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial
The honored veterans will ride in the Indianapolis 500 Festival Parade today and take a spin around Indianapolis Motor Speedway before Sunday's race.

Clyde Choate, 78, of Anna, Ill., brought two grandsons to see the memorial.

"There's probably hundreds of thousands of members of the armed forces that did equally as much as we few have done," said Choate, an Army staff sergeant who single-handedly destroyed an enemy tank in France during World War II. "But they were never recognized for it."