



Special to the Caloosa Belle/Courtesy photo

The Hendry County commissioners (rear) with, from left, LaBelle American Legion Post 130 Commander Matt Kindermann and Vietnam veterans Doug Stowell and Ron Price.



CUTINHA, NICHOLAS J.

★ BACK

Rank: Specialist Fourth Class  
 Organization: U.S. Army  
 Company: Company C, 4th Battalion  
 Division: 9th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infan

## Unique ceremony on March 3 at Fort Denaud Cemetery

By Chris Felker  
 Caloosa Belle

CLEWISTON — County commissioners have declared Friday, March 2, as “Manchu Warrior Day,” partly to honor the memory of a Medal of Honor recipient from Hendry County who saved nine of his platoonmates in a 1968 battle during the Vietnam War.

The proclamation was read into the record and passed unanimously by the Hendry County Board at its meeting Tuesday, Feb. 13. U.S. Army Spec. 4 Nicholas Cutinha served with the Manchu Warriors (Company C, 4th Battalion, 9th Regiment, 25th Army Infantry Division) during the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, and was fatally wounded during the rescue. The Manchu Warriors fought valiantly during the Battle of Hoc Mon on March 2, 1968, in which 49 of the unit’s 92 soldiers were killed and 24 wounded in just eight minutes during an ambush.

Spec. 4 Cutinha was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for valor under fire, with the medal presented to his mother by President Richard Nixon. That medal is unique in the United States because it’s the only one on public display in a veterans facility.

Board Chairman Mitchell Wills gave the floor to LaBelle American Legion Post 130

Commander Matt Kindermann, who said he’d brought two of the surviving Manchu Warriors with him. He introduced veteran Doug Stowell, “who snowbirds here in Hendry.”

Said Mr. Stowell: “We really appreciate being honored in this way. As everybody knows, the Vietnam veterans didn’t get much respect or appreciation when they came home, and ... we really appreciate it for the sacrifices everybody made, and a lot of them made the ultimate sacrifice.”

Mr. Kindermann then introduced Ron Price. “He was actually ... at the Battle of Hoc Mon ... and lives in Southwest Florida as well.”

“Our medal recipient is buried at Fort Denaud Cemetery. I’ve maintained his gravesite for the last 10 years because all of his whole family’s gone,” said Mr. Price. “I’m very honored that American Legion Post 130 there in LaBelle (is marking) the 50th anniversary of the Hoc Mon ambush that we were in, when Nick Cutinha sacrificed his life. He saved nine of my men’s lives and took 15 of the enemies’ lives and, unfortunately, sacrificed his life, too. So I thank you all for the proclamation and the honor of my fellow veterans.” Mr. Price is vice president of the 9th Infantry

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Regiment Manchu Association and senior commander of the Disabled American Veterans chapter in Cape Coral.

Mr. Kindermann said the Medal of Honor is the nation’s highest military honor and that LaBelle’s Legion post is unique because it is custodian of Mr. Cutinha’s medal. He explained: “The medal that’s hanging in the American Legion hall in LaBelle is the actual medal that was handed to the surviving mother by President Nixon, so it’s the original. The case that it’s in had to be certified by the Secret Service to afford it a certain level of protection. The American Legion doesn’t own the medal, it’s owned by the family, but the family just needed a place to keep it, and we make it available for public viewing.”

Added Mr. Price: “It’s the only veterans organization in the United States that has a Medal of Honor on display by the ... Department of Defense.”

Noting this uniqueness of the event in the nation, Commissioner Karson Turner said: “Mr. Chair, it’s the definition of Americana history, I mean, it’s amazing. Thank you all for what you have done for our country.”

Said Mr. Kindermann: “March 2 is the actual 50th anniversary of the event. We’re going to have a celebration at the American