

Medal of Honor advisers

COLTON: Five men who received the decoration speak to ROTC members from several schools.

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More than 400 cadets from eight Inland high schools filed into Colton High School's Whitmer Auditorium on Tuesday morning, sat attentively and listened carefully to five rock stars of military service: recipients of the Medal of Honor.

The five — Army soldiers John F. Baker Jr., James A. Taylor and Ronald E. Ray and Marines Harvey C. Barnum Jr. and Jay R. Vargas — earned the military's highest honor during the Vietnam War. But a hush came over the room as an honor guard marched in with the American flag and cheers erupted as the five heroes made their way to the stage.

"I look at them and I think of them as the perfect survival soldiers," said Rayvond Saunders, a 17-year-old Air Force ROTC cadet from San Bernardino High School.

"It was pretty interesting," he said "This is my first time doing this kind of stuff."



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Medal of Honor recipients, from left, Harvey "Barney" Barnum, Jr., John Baker Jr., James Taylor, Jay Vargas, and Ronald Ray are honored Tuesday at Whitmer Auditorium at Colton High School.

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The hour-long event was arranged by Stater Bros. CEO and Navy veteran Jack Brown as a patriotic pep talk to potential future veterans.

"It is an honor to be with America's future," said Taylor, who received his Medal of Honor from President Lyndon Johnson in 1968. "Remember you are part of the team. You are soon to join the greatest team on Earth, our armed forces."

The veterans spoke brief-

ly, one at a time, before fielding questions about what they had done to help save wounded comrades, how it felt to receive their medals and whether they had been back to Vietnam since the war. Some had. Some had not.

Their message to the kids was short and simple: Set goals and never stop trying.

"You are all, I like to say, climbing the ladder of life and you are of couple of steps on that ladder right now," Barnum said. "I want you to look up that ladder and set your goals high.

Never say 'It's too hard.' Never say, 'I can't.' And for God's sake, take the word failure out of your vocabulary."

"If you fail, like Barney said, pick yourself up," Vargas said. "Each and every one of us, throughout our lives, have fallen and maybe we have failed at a couple of things. But we never gave up."

Aleccia Palmer, 17, of Eisenhower High School in Rialto, said she got the message.

"Take failure out of your vocabulary," she said after the speeches. "That was in my mind the whole time."

Daniel Grygar, 14, a Naval ROTC cadet at Colton High, was also impressed.

"It was really cool," he said. "I'm glad I got to see them and (learn) how they got the Medal of Honor."

Saunders said he and some of his fellow cadets have made up their minds about military service.

"I told them, 'If I go into the war, will you all come with me?'," he said. "They all put their hands up and we all agreed. We go in the war."

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