

Basil L. Plumley, Veteran of Three Wars, Dies at 92

By DENNIS HEVESI October 15, 2012 NYTIMES

Night had fallen as American and North Vietnamese soldiers exchanged sheets of gunfire during Operation Landing Zone X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. Illumination flares attached to parachutes floated from American aircraft.

One parachute failed to open, and the flare plummeted into stacks of ammunition crates near the command post of the First Battalion, Seventh Cavalry Regiment, one of several American units engaged in the Vietnam War's first major battle with North Vietnamese regulars.

Sgt. Maj. Basil L. Plumley jumped to his feet, reached into the pile, grabbed the burning flare and tossed it into a clearing. For that unhesitating action, he earned the Silver Star. It was one of more than 30 decorations he would receive; among the others were the rare honor of a Combat Infantryman's Badge with two stars, signifying that he had fought in three wars.

"It's very rare for someone to have served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam," said retired Col. Greg Camp, executive vice president of the National Infantry Museum in Columbus, Ga., near Fort Benning. Only 325 soldiers have ever received what is known as the "Triple C.I.B."

Sergeant Major Plumley, who died at 92 on Wednesday at a hospice in Columbus, Ga., also has the distinction of having received the Master Combat Parachutist Badge with a gold star, indicating that he had leapt into battle five times during his 32-year military career.

"In World War II, he made four combat jumps into hostile fire: at Sicily, Salerno, on D-Day in Normandy and in Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands," Colonel Camp said. "To have then made a fifth jump in Korea would make him one of a very few to have earned a gold star on his jump wings."

Sergeant Major Plumley received wider prestige after the 1992 publication of "We Were Soldiers Once ...and Young," an account of the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley, and the 2002 release of the movie based on the book, "We Were Soldiers." The book was written by Joseph L. Galloway and Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore, who as a lieutenant colonel at the time was commander of the First Battalion, Seventh Cavalry. The movie starred Mel Gibson as the colonel and Sam Elliott as Sergeant Major Plumley.

Mr. Galloway was a United Press International correspondent attached to the battalion during the Ia Drang battle in the remote Central Highlands of Vietnam. "This was a cliffhanger situation, 450 Americans in an understrength battalion surrounded by more than 2,000 North Vietnamese regular troops," Mr. Galloway said in an interview on Thursday. "In four days, 234 Americans were killed." (Colonel Camp of the Infantry Museum said the North Vietnamese lost many more troops.)

At 6-foot-2, Sergeant Major Plumley was a no-nonsense, almost monosyllabic leader, Mr. Galloway said, even to a civilian. On Day 2, he recalled: “This battle blew up and I hit the ground. I’m laying as flat as I can and Plumley walks up, kicks me in the ribs and hollers, ‘Can’t take no pictures laying there on the ground, sonny!’ ”

To the troops, he was “Iron Jaw.”

Basil Leonard Plumley was born in Blue Jay, W.Va., on Jan. 1, 1920, one of six children of Clay and Georgia Plumley. His father was a coal miner. After two years of high school and work as truck and tractor driver, he enlisted in the Army in 1942.

His daughter, Debbie Kimble, said he died within two weeks of being told he had colon cancer, and four months after his wife of 62 years, the former Deurice Dillon, died. Besides his daughter, he is survived by a granddaughter and two great-grandsons.

After retiring from the Army in 1974, he worked for 15 years as an administrative assistant at the Martin Army Community Hospital at Fort Benning.

In his later years, particularly after “We Were Soldiers” was released, Sergeant Major Plumley was frequently invited to speak at officer and noncommissioned officer courses. “He was a terror in insisting on hard, realistic training, the highest possible standards, because he knew that saves lives in combat,” Mr. Galloway said.

But when his phone rang and an interviewer asked him to tell war stories, he would hang up.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/16/us/basil-l-plumley-decorated-army-veteran-dies-at-92.html>



Ed Freeman

You're an 18 or 19 year old kid. You're critically wounded, and dying in the jungle in the Ia Drang Valley, 11-14-1965. LZ Xray, Vietnam. Your Infantry Unit is outnumbered 8 - 1, and the enemy fire is so intense, from 100 or 200 yards away, that your own Infantry Commander has ordered the MediVac helicopters to stop coming in.

You're lying there, listening to the enemy machine guns, and you know you're not getting out. Your family is 1/2 way around the world, 12,000 miles away, and you'll never see them again. As the world starts to fade in and out, you know this is the day.

Then, over the machine gun noise, you faintly hear that sound of a helicopter, and you look up to see a Huey, but it doesn't seem real, because no Medi-Vac markings are on it.

Ed Freeman is coming for you. He's not Medi-Vac, so it's not his job, but he's flying his Huey down into the machine gun fire, after the Medi-Vacs were ordered not to come.

He's coming anyway.

And he drops it in, and sits there in the machine gun fire, as they load 2 or 3 of you on board.

Then he flies you up and out through the gunfire, to the Doctors and Nurses.

And, he kept coming back... 13 more times... and took about 30 of you and your buddies out, who would never have gotten out.

Medal of Honor Recipient Ed Freeman died at the age of 80, in Boise, Idaho.

<http://www.2news.tv/news/local/27180989.html>



"I WILL ALWAYS BE IN AWE OF MAJOR BRUCE CRANDALL FOR HIS EXTRAORDINARY BRAVERY AND BRILLIANT FLYING SKILL UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT WARTIME CONDITIONS - FLYING CONTINUOUSLY INTO A HOT LZ TO SUPPORT A US BATTALION SURROUNDED BY ELEMENTS OF THREE NORTH VIETNAMESE REGIMENTS. BY RISKING HIS OWN LIFE IN LEADING THESE HAZARDOUS FLIGHTS, MAJOR CRANDALL PROVIDED EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP TO THE REST OF HIS COMPANY WHICH CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE THREE DAY ORDEAL."

John D. Herren - Colonel United States Army (Ret.),
EXCERPT FROM NOMINATION LETTER WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF MAJOR CRANDALL

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

Major Bruce P. Crandall distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism as a Flight Commander in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). On 14 November 1965, his flight of sixteen helicopters was lifting troops for a search and destroy mission from Plei Me, Vietnam, to Landing Zone X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley. On the fourth troop lift, the airlift began to take enemy fire, and by the time the aircraft had refueled and returned for the next troop lift, the enemy had Landing Zone X-Ray targeted. As Major Crandall and the first eight helicopters landed to discharge troops on his fifth troop lift, his unarmed helicopter came under such intense enemy fire that the ground commander ordered the second flight of eight aircraft to abort their mission. As Major Crandall flew back to Plei Me, his base of operations, he determined that the ground commander of the besieged infantry battalion desperately needed more ammunition. Major Crandall then decided to adjust his base of operations to Artillery Firebase Falcon in order to shorten the flight distance to deliver ammunition and evacuate wounded soldiers. While medical evacuation was not his mission, he immediately sought volunteers and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, led the two aircraft to Landing Zone X-Ray. Despite the fact that the landing zone was still under relentless enemy fire, Major Crandall landed and proceeded to supervise the loading of seriously wounded soldiers aboard his aircraft. Major Crandall's voluntary decision to land under the most extreme fire instilled in the other pilots the will and spirit to continue to land their own aircraft, and in the ground forces the realization that they would be resupplied and that friendly wounded would be promptly evacuated. This greatly enhanced morale and the will to fight at a critical time. After his first medical evacuation, Major Crandall continued to fly into and out of the landing zone throughout the day and into the evening. That day he completed a total of 22 flights, most under intense enemy fire, retiring from the battlefield only after all possible service had been rendered to the Infantry battalion. His actions provided critical resupply of ammunition and evacuation of the wounded. Major Crandall's daring acts of bravery and courage in the face of an overwhelming and determined enemy are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

<http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/crandall/index.html>

The United States of America.

To all who shall see these presents, greetings:

This is to certify that the President of the United States of America by Executive Order, 24 August 1962, has awarded THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL with "V" device to JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY for heroism while accompanying the 7th Cavalry Regiment.

During the afternoon of 14 November 1965 a furious battle had been fought between the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, and the 66th Regiment of the Peoples Army of Vietnam. Mr. Galloway voluntarily boarded a helicopter which landed at night on a hazardous resupply run into an active combat situation where he was determined to report to the world details of the first major battle of the Vietnam War. Early on 15 November 1965 in the fury of the action, an American fighter bomber dropped two napalm bombs on the Battalion Command Post and Aid Station area gravely wounding two soldiers. Mr. Galloway and a medical aid man rose, braving enemy fire, and ran to the aid of the injured soldiers. The medical aid man was immediately shot and killed. With assistance from another man, Mr. Galloway carried one of the injured soldiers to the medical aid station. He remained on the ground throughout the grueling three-day battle, frequently under fire, until the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry was replaced by other forces of the 1st Cavalry Division.

Mr. Galloway's valorous actions under enemy fire and his determination to get accurate, factual reports to the American people reflect great credit upon himself and American War Correspondents.

Given under my hand in the City of Washington this 8th day of January 1998

Earl M. Simms BG USA
The Adjutant General

Robert M. Walker, Acting
Secretary of the Army

