

VLF's NEWSLETTER

Honoring Grandpa

First off, I had no idea what a Distinguished Flying Cross was, but it sounded impressive. A quick Google search and a discussion with my dad, verified this thought--it was very impressive. According to the Distinguished Flying Cross Society, it is the oldest military aviation award and can be awarded to anyone in the military air corps who "distinguished himself by heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight."



All of this was precipitated by the fact that I had just learned in the spring of 2007 that my grandfather, Col Vincent Fonke (ret) would receive this elite award for his heroics in WWII as a B-17 Bomber pilot. Grandpa was typically demure about it all...the rest of us--ecstatic.

The way Grandpa saw it; he was just doing his job that day back in August of 1944. When he felt his aircraft being hit by fire from enemy fighters on a mission, he knew that he had to stabilize the aircraft, even as it began to spin and roll out of flying formation. He righted the aircraft long enough to save his crew by allowing them the time to bail out before he jumped as well.

After years of hearing the story, my dad believed that Grandpa deserved an award for this act, but found that the process was complicated and almost impossible without knowing the proper channels. Then dedicated volunteers, who would later create the Veterans' Legacy Foundation, took on the case and immediately made progress with a



Executive Director's Corner

We have had to do some administrative work to catch up with outcome of the elections this past November.

There were numerous changes in congressional district representation requiring us to wait until the new offices were open and ready for business.

If that wasn't enough, all the districts maps were changed. Congressional staff's had to refer casework to the new representative and we had to check each case to the appropriate representative as well.

For the most part the new representatives welcomed our assistance with open arms and

much more efficient process. Thirteen months later Grandpa and the rest of us in the family found ourselves at an emotional awards ceremony at Pope Air Force Base, watching him receive the Distinguished Flying Cross.

The air hangar was full of people, and as family we were escorted to a designated area for special guests, where we met a three star Air Force general and a U.S. Congressman. After some brief refreshments, we were seated on the front row, and Grandpa was center stage.



It's hard to describe the feeling of seeing him, my hero, standing front and center, getting the recognition he so rightly deserved. I can say it's a moment I will never forget.

He seemed at ease, and yet when the applause did not stop, he humbly waved it off as if he was uncomfortable with so much attention. Grandpa was not into excesses in any form whatsoever. And at 85 years old, he stood at attention just as if he was still active duty and received the award. All the other military personnel there seemed to view him as a comrade. The General and Congressman made their remarks, and it was obvious that they both had a lot of respect for Grandpa and his military service. I was proud to see other people as proud as I was of his accomplishments, and not only Air Force, but all branches of service.

Then Grandpa approached the podium. Soon, a story I had heard for years again took life. I could see the on the faces of the audience that they too were captivated by the story and they could almost see the scene he described. He animatedly gestured as only a natural storyteller could. I imagined how many times he had told it at S.E.R.E graduations and how this served such a purpose for so many soldiers beyond just his family and loved ones. He was a teacher to his very core I realized that day. It also struck me that even 60 years later, this story seemed timeless.

Overall it was a day I will never forget. To see such an unassuming man as my grandpa to be given such a great honor will always stand out in my memory. And the smile on his face was as timeless as ever that day.

AF

Note: The author has since joined the VLF team to continue honoring veterans.

Did You Know...

In 1899, the Surgeon General set criteria for a Reserve Force of nurses. The Spanish-American war proved that without a reserve force, there would be a nursing shortage during wartime. The Army Nurse Corps became a permanent corps of the Medical Department under the

looked forward to working with us on veteran requests. So some of you may have to sign "new" authorization or release forms.

We continue to research and process the cases as fast as we are able. We currently have 265 open cases and as the word goes out about our services, the more requests we receive. Some have said that we need to hold off on accepting more casework, but we have a hard time saying "no".

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Army Reorganization Act passed by Congress on 2 February 1901. Congress also consequently established the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908. The Red Cross became a quasi-official federal agency in 1905 and took upon itself primary responsibility for recruiting and assigning nurses.



In World War I the military recruited 20,000 registered nurses (all women) for military and navy duty in 58 military hospitals; they helped staff 47 ambulance companies that operated on the Western Front as well as transport ships, hospital trains in France and mobile surgical hospitals stateside. More than 10,000 served overseas. The women were kept well back from the front lines, and although none were killed by enemy action, more than 200 died from disease, especially influenza.

The war provided a movement for more professional requirements, and the Army School of Nursing was opened in May of 1918. In 1920, Army Nurse Corps personnel received officer-equivalent ranks and wore Army rank insignia on their uniforms. However, they did not receive equivalent pay and were not considered part of the US Army.

At the start of the war in December 1941, there were fewer than 1000 nurses in the Army Nurse Corps, which took only unmarried women age 22–30 who had their RN training from civilian schools. They enlisted for the war plus six months, and were discharged if they married or became pregnant. On 26 February 1944 Congress passed a bill that granted Army Nurses actual military rank, approved for the duration of the war plus 6 months.

Army nurses worked tirelessly during WWII, often enduring the same hardships as combat troops. Two-hundred and fifteen nurses died while bravely serving. Sixty-seven army nurses were held as Japanese prisoners of war for thirty-seven months in the Philippines after the fall of Corregidor in 1942, during which they continued to care for the wounded. Nurses played an integral role in medical advancements; access to care closer to the front lines, advanced surgical procedures and post-surgical nursing, the administration of blood products and improvements in evacuation procedures led to greatly improved survival rates. Fixed wing air evacuations moved the wounded to definitive care more quickly, and flight nursing was born. The first class of Army flight nurses to graduate was in February, 1943.

During the Korean War, Army nurses would once again treat the wounded. Nurses would staff MASH units and standard emplaced hospitals in Japan and Korea. Nurses were on the forefront of battlefield medicine during the conflict, playing a major role in the treatment of the wounded U.N. forces within mere minutes or hours of the wounds being inflicted.

During the Vietnam War many Army nurses would see deployment to South East Asia. Army nurses would staff all major Army hospitals in the theatre, including: Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang, and Saigon. Vietnam would be the first major deployment of men as nurses into the combat theater, as men could be located in more hazardous locations than what was considered safe for females. Many Army nurses faced enemy fire for the first time due to the unconventional nature of the conflict, and several nurses would die from direct enemy fire. On at least one

occasion the US Army hospital at Cam Ranh Bay was attacked and severely damaged, with fatalities of both patients and staff.

Operation Desert Shield/Storm signaled a new era in trauma care. Approximately 2,200 Army nurses served in forty-four hospitals, some part of joint operations with host nations. Wounds were now more prevalent to the extremities and new types of traumatic injuries resulted in the need for more advanced protective gear. Army Nurses quickly adapted to the changing battle environment by deploying DEPMEDS, (Deployable Medical Systems), and enhancing trauma training for critical care nurses deployed to theater in subsequent campaigns. Since Desert Storm, army nurses have deployed to theaters in Haiti, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and for disaster relief and Humanitarian efforts worldwide.

Note: VLF had the opportunity to honor a nurse, a First Lieutenant, who served in the Army Nurse Corp during WWII in the Philippines.

References:

Wikipedia

US Army Medical Department, Army Nurse Corps History

ME

A DIFFERENT KIND OF HERO

We should consider all our service members heroes, whether they only served 2 years or over 30, were in a active combat role or in a support role, or deployed in a combat zone or remained stateside. Each veteran performs his or her duties as part of the overall mission.

We hear of the heroes who are wounded or give the ultimate sacrifice. We hear of those veterans that performed extraordinary acts or whose bravery stood out above others. They wear their medals and ribbons proudly...as they should. I want to discuss those heroes that are not able to be recognized, that do not or *will not* have the visible medals that signify their heroic deeds.

Here is an example of the stories we have heard. Let's examine the infantry NCO during the Korean War. It's cold. The fighting is fierce. He's seen places called Heart Break Ridge, the Punch Bowl and Pork Chop Hill. He's walked, eaten and slept in bitter cold conditions--hardships that we can only imagine. He has been with his unit ever since they arrived...many of them very young, only boys. During one battle the enemy is attacking with overwhelming numbers. He is wounded...not bad, but wounded nonetheless. He should go seek medical aid, but he doesn't want to leave his men. He gets a medic to "patch him up", returns to his men rather than going on to the aid station. Months go by and the war is finally over and it's time to go home.

Over the years he tells his war stories, including when he was wounded. Now almost 60 years later, one of his children asks where his Purple Heart is. He tells them that no one put him in for it, and now it's too late. They say it's unfair and look for help to get their father recognized as the hero, they know he is. However after much research and letter writing, the answer is the same: the Army needs proof. Since he did not seek official medical aid at the time

where it would be documented...the wounding essentially didn't take place. And as with many veterans, they felt that they were just doing their job and it wasn't worth pursuing at the time.

There are numerous other examples...the Marine getting wounded during the Battle of Saipan or the soldier in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive. Each wanting to pass their military legacy on to their children and grandchildren, but due to their selfless acts and only worrying about duty they are not able to pass everything along. However, in their children and grandchildren's eyes they are still heroes. And what about the 19 year old B-17 tail gunner, who was killed when his aircraft was attacked...not married, came from a poor Midwestern family who could not afford to bury him, laid to rest overseas with his other comrades in arms...a quiet hero, a hero just like the hundreds of thousands of young Americans just risking their lives in combat with no fuss or muss--who will pass on his story?

Perhaps heroes such as these will not be able to receive all the medals they are due, but they deserve to be recognized...remembered for their service and sacrifice. These heroes each left a legacy just waiting for someone to read and experience. Family members, descendants rather than wondering who their family member was or what they did ...should actively search and fill in that gap in their family history and it may give you a new perspective to your family's contribution. And if you need help, contact us at VLF.

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Thank You



We would like to thank TharpeRobbins Company for their support in several VLF veteran cases. In 1919, the North Carolina General Assembly approved the issuance of a medal to North Carolina World War I veterans. Very few medals remain. Veterans' Legacy Foundation was able to obtain a few of these, but the medals were in disrepair after 94 years. The original manufacturer was Robbins Company of Attleboro, MA, now TharpeRobbins which is also located in Statesville, NC. With their skill and generosity, the medals were refurbished to its original condition, which were presented to the veterans' family members.



Again we have to thank the North Carolina National Guard for their continued support in numerous awards ceremonies recognizing veterans throughout our state. We do not know what we would do without their support and talent.



We would like to thank all our sponsors of our annual bike ride. They are: M & B Auto and Tire, Chiropractic and Wellness Clinic, Tiger Rock Taekwondo, Shell Rapid Lube and AutoSpa, Dairy Queen (Spring Lake), Rolling Thunder NCI, Operation Helping Hand for Heroes, Spout Springs Firefighters Association, Yesterday's Pub and Grille and Advanced Auto (of Cameron).