

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Proudly Honors



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LIEUTENANT COLONEL (O-5)
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as

PURPLE HEART PATRIOT
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Honoring his service and Sacrifice

Sponsored by: **Missouri State Society, Daughters of the American Revolution**
on behalf of the Military Order of the Purple Heart



My day-to-day job was flying OH-6A “Cayuse” helicopters, getting as low and close to the enemy (hidden in the jungle) as possible. We tried to draw them out so that our gunships flying above us could engage them with mini-guns and other weapons. Flying scouts was a little dangerous, but “fun”.

As a “real live officer” or “RLO”, I had additional duties in the troop. My additional duty was to brief the squadron commander at his tactical operations center (TOC) every morning and evening on the activities of the air cavalry troop during the day. I briefed him on our flying schedule, what we found during our reconnaissance, and our maintenance status (how many aircraft were down for maintenance and why). He would give me instructions to take back to the troop commander or operations officer.

The squadron TOC was a bunker made of very large wooden beams, like railroad ties but much larger, that created a frame. The frame supported some sort of crossbeams and covering, and then the entire structure was buried under layers of sandbags. It was lighted and had chairs, and served as the squadron’s operation center, but the briefing area had only a dirt floor. My briefing came near the end of the agenda and, by that time, the squadron commander was either bored or had a sore bottom from sitting so long. For some reason, he always carried a golf putter to these briefings. And so, in the middle of my briefing, he would routinely stand and begin to put small rocks across

the ground. The first time that he did this, I stopped my briefing – partly from surprise but also because when a commander stands, this normally requires everyone else to stand and means that a briefing or other event is over. When I stopped, he never looked up but continued putting and said, “Carry on, lieutenant; carry on.” So I continued my briefing and he continued putting. I assume that he heard as much of the briefing as he cared to hear.

One evening, when I completed my briefing, the squadron commander said, “Lieutenant, how would you like to get some ground can experience?” This meant experience with an armored cavalry unit on the ground somewhere out in the boonies. I had no interest at all in getting that kind of experience, but it would not be polite or prudent to say so to an armored cavalry squadron commander in the rank of lieutenant colonel. So, I politely said, “Sir, I haven’t been around armored cavalry equipment or doctrine since the basic course. I’m afraid that I would lose men and equipment that are too valuable to entrust to a lieutenant with my lack of experience.” He replied, “Don’t worry about that, lieutenant. If you lose anything, it will reflect on your OER [annual officer evaluation report that determines one’s future in the Army]. Report to the squadron on _____ [a few days later]. You’ll be taking over as platoon leader until a replacement arrives.”

I could not refuse the order, and I was convinced that instead of enjoying a fairly comfortable tour in an aviation unit, I was about to go out and die on the ground. I was genuinely depressed – not scared, but depressed – because I thought of my wife and child at home who believed that I was in a relatively safe environment.

On the appointed day, I reported to the squadron with my bag of personal belongings and a couple of extra uniforms and joined the 2nd Platoon, Troop B. I met the platoon sergeant who would have to babysit me until I learned the ropes of armored cavalry. It was a cold, rainy day and perfectly matched my mood.



As it turned out, I was with the platoon for about a month. During that time, we did lose men and fighting vehicles in combat, and I earned a Purple Heart for wounds received in action on 9 October 1971. But at the end of the month, I returned to the squadron, met my replacement and handed off the platoon, and was permitted to return to flying duty – and my briefings in the TOC. It was an interesting experience, but not one that I wanted to repeat – then or now.

The business of the Purple Heart needs to be clarified. I have never been completely comfortable with my award of the Purple Heart. I received the medal for lacerations to my hands and arms during a firefight that we had with an unseen enemy force one day while I was “leading” the armored cavalry platoon and we were ambushed. Events like

that are very chaotic. However, AR 600-8-22 paragraph 2-8b, indicates that I met “specific criteria”. I honestly do not know if I received grenade fragment wounds or what.



When the enemy triggered their ambush, I was riding on the second vehicle in a column of vehicles. For the most part, we tried to stay off the roads and move across the terrain because the enemy liked to put mines in the roads. At the point where we were ambushed, we had to move onto the road to cross a small creek. The creek itself was so choked with fallen trees and other foliage that we could not ford the stream. So we drove onto a nearby road, crossed the stream over a culvert, and were preparing to move back down off the road. As the last vehicle in our column crossed the culvert, the enemy

detonated some sort of explosive that they had planted there. The explosion broke the track on one side of the APC, forcing it to stop. The driver had been sitting so that he could look out of his open hatch, and the upward force of the explosion followed by the APC coming back down onto the culvert snapped his head forward and down. The explosion also loosened the open hatch cover from its retaining lock. The hatch cover slammed the driver’s head down. About one-half inch of his lower lip [another account says his entire lower jaw.] was chopped off by the metal edge of the hatch. At the same time, the enemy, concealed in a nearby bamboo thicket to our left, fired a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at the lead vehicle in our column. Their intent was to disable that vehicle, too, and box in the entire column so that they could attack us at their discretion; we would have been “sitting ducks”. Fortunately, we were practicing one good rule of tactical movement: our vehicles had plenty of space between them. As a result, the enemy had to fire the RPG at about a 45° angle and they overshot the lead vehicle. This had two effects: they failed to disable the lead vehicle and they gave away their position. Our platoon vehicles immediately executed what is called a neutral steer to the left (the vehicles all simply pivoted in place to face the enemy location) and opened fire on the bamboo thicket.

The vehicle on which I was riding, an M551 Sheridan tank, was commanded by the platoon sergeant who immediately began firing his M2 .50 caliber machine gun. I was not manning a vehicle-mounted gun and was actually in the way of the tank crew as they maneuvered the turret to engage the enemy. So I jumped down from the tank with my personal weapons and began to run back along our column to the last vehicle. I intended to assess the damage and injuries and, from that location, call for medical evacuation and other support. Somewhere, in the course of this engagement, I received a lot of lacerations to my hands and arms. I was seeping blood from all of these lacerations, but I was not seriously injured at all.

Once the engagement was over, our platoon medic cleaned me up. As I recall, I did not even require Band-Aids. The lacerations simply stopped bleeding on their own and the medic’s treatment was just to prevent infection in the tropical climate. As was required,

the medic completed a field treatment card to record any medical care that he provided and to account for his supplies. That field treatment card on my lacerations was apparently stored away in a shipping container and forgotten. Months later, when we were back in the States at Fort Campbell, those shipping containers were emptied. Apparently, the squadron adjutant found that field medical card, submitted it (with many others, I'm sure), and it formed the basis for my Purple Heart. I suppose that the lacerations met the requirements of the regulation, but I have never been certain that I really deserved the medal.

Some photos from that month –



The “Angels in the Battlefield” was in the notice that I received of the “Purple Heart Patriots” project of the Missouri Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). It struck me because my service was not some heroic impulse of my own. My service was inspired by others. Please permit me to explain.

I am an amateur historian and genealogist. As a result, over 75(+) years, I have discovered some interesting ancestors.

Both my wife and I trace our families back to the Pilgrims. Her ninth-great-grandfather (eleven generations before her) was Governor William H. Bradford of Plymouth Colony. My Puritan ancestors were the Folgers, one of whom – Abiah Folger – was the mother of Benjamin Franklin.

I trace my ancestry to William Black Ferguson, a 20-year-old Irish lad who fought in the American Revolution. So, my father (in memoriam), my son, my three grandsons and I are all members of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). My older daughter is an active member of the Yates Mill Chapter of the DAR in North Carolina.

My great-grandfather fought for the Union in the Civil War as a member of Company E, 20th Infantry Regiment, Michigan Volunteers. He was wounded at Campbell's Station, Tennessee, in 1863, during the attack on Knoxville. So, my son and I are also members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW).

My great-grandmother (the wife of my Civil War soldier) was a cousin of Clarissa Howe “Clara” Barton, the original “Angel of the Battlefield” and the founder of the

American Red Cross. An excellent source that explains how she earned her title is *A Woman of Valor – Clara Barton and the Civil War* by Stephen B. Oates. That book focuses on her amazing selfless and unarmed service on active combat battlefields.

Two of my uncles served during World War II, one in the US Navy and the other in the US Coast Guard (which had been activated for wartime service in the Pacific theater). A third built bombers, perhaps even the *Enola Gay*.

My father was a Lutheran pastor in Kirksville, Missouri, and I was born there. He was a clergyman, and he was deferred from active duty in order to comfort waiting and too-often bereaved families. Sadly, many of those families were of German origin and bore the additional stigma of suspicion from their non-German neighbors.

Later we moved to Salt Lake City, my father's hometown. There I met a member of his congregation, DeLeneMarie (née Jensen) Holm. She enlisted as a 91C licensed practical nurse and then volunteered for duty with the 144th Evacuation Hospital, Utah Army National Guard. She was ultimately promoted to Sergeant First Class and Platoon Sergeant. This was during the Vietnam conflict and she risked deployment like any other soldier. She later earned her RN (registered nurse) and became an officer. Her unit later deployed to combat during Operation *Desert Shield*. She was and remains an amazingly caring, decent and honorable woman whom I thoroughly admire.

At the same time, my younger brother joined the Army but was never deployed to combat because the Vietnam conflict had just ended when he came of age. But he returned to Salt Lake City, joined the 19th Special Forces Group (Utah ARNG), completed his college degree, and reentered the active Army as an infantry officer.

In 1981, I was deployed to Syria to replace a US Marine Corps officer. During our short overlap, we learned that we had much in common. We remain in contact to this day. LtCol Dennis C. Lindemann is now retired. However, he and his wife live just off base at Camp Pendleton. They are very active in supporting young Marines, especially through support of chapel activities. When I once asked LtCol Lindemann to decorate my parents' gravesites in Bonita, CA, he did so. When I offered to reimburse him for the flowers and his travel expenses, he refused saying that "Service is its own reward".

400(+) years of selfless service by others have been my motivation to serve. I am proud to have helped my fellow Americans, but I am no hero – just a service member.