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## SECTION IV – A VHPA tribute to Vietnam Helicopter Medal of Honor Recipients by Mike Law

In keeping with the traditions set by past VHPA Directories, the Directory Committee presents a few pages to support the theme of this edition – a tribute to all the "Helicopter Medal of Honor" recipients from the Vietnam War. Due to page limits, only a portion of this material is printed in this edition while the full version is on the membership directory web site on <https://directory.vhpa.org>

### Introduction

The material printed in this Directory is a derivative of the 3 July 2017 "Helicopter Medal of Honor Tribute Breakfast" presentation given during the 2017 VHPA Reunion in Indianapolis. As an intro to that presentation, the audience learned that the VHPA leadership wanted to take advantage of having the Reunion so near Major Kettles' residence and seeing that he was awarded the medal just after our Reno Reunion. So we scheduled this Breakfast to honor him and to let VHPAers get to meet him. We are honored that he is here today. Next we looked through the VHPA's archives for a list of helicopter related CMOH (Congressional Medal of Honor) recipients and found none. As the research to develop this list progressed we realized that in addition to helicopter pilot and crew member recipients there were two other groups well worth mentioning: (1) recipients who were serving in a helicopter unit but were not crew members and (2) recipients who rescued helicopter crew members during the action recognized in their award.

### Helicopter Pilot CMOH Recipients

- Adams, William E. Major U.S. Army
- Brady, Patrick Henry Major U.S. Army\*
- Crandall, Bruce P. Major U.S. Army\*
- Ferguson, Frederick Edgar Chief Warrant Officer U.S. Army\*
- Fleming, James P. 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant U.S. Air Force\*
- Freeman, Ed W. Captain U.S. Army
- Kettles, Charles S. Major U.S. Army\*
- Lassen, Clyde Everett Lieutenant U.S. Navy
- Novosel, Michael J. Chief Warrant Officer U.S. Army
- Pless, Stephen W. Major U.S. Marine Corps
- Swanson, Jon E. Captain U.S. Army
- Young, Gerald O. Captain U.S. Air Force

### Helicopter Crew Member CMOH Recipients

- Clausen, Raymond M. Private First Class U.S. Marine Corps
- Pitsenbarger, William H. Airman First Class U.S. Air Force

- Wetzel, Gary George Private First Class U.S. Army\*
- Yano, Rodney J.T. Sergeant First Class U.S. Army

### Helicopter Unit CMOH Recipients

- Langhorn, Garfield M. Private First Class U.S. Army
- McKibben, Ray Sergeant U.S. Army
- Poxon, Robert Leslie First Lieutenant U.S. Army

### Helicopter Rescue CMOH Recipients

- Rocco, Louis R. Staff Sergeant U.S. Army
- Zabitosky, Fred William Sergeant First Class U.S. Army

\* Denotes this person is living

### Vietnam CMOH statistics

As of August 2017, there are 261 Vietnam War CMOH recipients. Only 51 are still living. As mentioned in the Photo Credits section on the Table of Contents page, there are three official versions of the Medal of Honor; one for the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy. USMC recipients wear the Navy version. Please refer to the Photo Credits details for the sources of the material that follows.



## Adams, William E.



**Rank:** Major

**Organization:** U.S. Army

**Company:** A/227th Assault Helicopter Company

**Division:** 52d Aviation Battalion, 1st Aviation Brigade

**Place / Date:** Kontum Province, Republic of Vietnam, 25 May 1971

**Duties:** Helicopter Pilot

Major Adams distinguished himself on 25 May 1971 while serving as a helicopter pilot in Kontum Province in the Republic of Vietnam. On that date, Maj. Adams volunteered to fly a lightly armed helicopter in an attempt to evacuate three seriously wounded soldiers from a small fire base which was under attack by a large enemy force. He made the decision with full knowledge that numerous anti-aircraft weapons were positioned around the base and that the clear weather would afford the enemy gunners unobstructed view of all routes into the base. As he approached the base, the enemy gunners opened fire with heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms. Undaunted by the fusillade, he continued his approach determined to accomplish the mission. Displaying tremendous courage under fire, he calmly directed the attacks of supporting gunships while maintaining absolute control of the helicopter he was flying. He landed the aircraft at the fire base despite the ever-increasing enemy fire and calmly waited until the wounded soldiers were placed on board. As his aircraft departed from the fire base, it was struck and seriously damaged by enemy anti-aircraft fire and began descending. Flying with exceptional skill, he immediately regained control of the crippled aircraft and attempted a controlled landing. Despite his valiant efforts, the helicopter exploded, overturned, and plummeted to earth amid the hail of enemy fire. Maj. Adams' conspicuous gallantry, intrepidity, and humanitarian regard for his fellow man were in keeping with the most cherished traditions of the military service and reflected utmost credit on him and the U.S. Army.

## Brady, Patrick Henry



**Rank:** Major

**Organization:** U.S. Army

**Company:** 54th Medical Detachment

**Division:** 67th Medical Group, 44th Medical Brigade

**Place / Date:** Near Chu Lai, Republic of Vietnam, 6 January 1968

**Duties:** Helicopter Pilot

Major Brady distinguished himself on 6 January 1968 while serving in the Republic of Vietnam commanding a UH-1H ambulance helicopter, volunteered to rescue wounded men from a site in enemy held territory which was reported to be heavily defended and to be blanketed by fog. To reach the site he descended through heavy fog and smoke and hovered slowly along a valley trail, turning his ship sideward to blow away the fog with the backwash from his rotor blades. Despite the unchallenged, close-range enemy fire, he found the dangerously small site, where he successfully landed and evacuated two badly wounded South Vietnamese soldiers. He was then called to another area completely covered by dense fog where American casualties lay only 50 meters from the enemy. Two aircraft had previously been shot down and others had made unsuccessful attempts to reach this site earlier in the day. With unmatched skill and extraordinary courage, Maj. Brady made four flights to this embattled landing zone and successfully rescued all the wounded. On his third mission of the day Maj. Brady once again landed at a site surrounded by the enemy. The friendly ground force, pinned down by enemy fire, had been unable to reach and secure the landing zone. Although his aircraft had been badly damaged and his controls partially shot away during his initial entry into this area, he returned minutes later and rescued the remaining injured. Shortly thereafter, obtaining a replacement aircraft, Maj. Brady was requested to land in an enemy minefield where a platoon of American soldiers was trapped. A mine detonated near his helicopter, wounding two crewmembers and damaging his ship. In spite of this, he managed to fly six severely injured patients to medical aid. Throughout that day Maj. Brady utilized three helicopters to evacuate a total of 51 seriously wounded men, many of whom would have perished without prompt medical treatment. Maj. Brady's bravery was in the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.



## Clausen, Raymond M.

**Rank:** Private First Class

**Organization:** U.S. Marine Corps

**Company:** Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263

**Division:** Marine Aircraft Group 16, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing

**Place / Date:** Republic of Vietnam, 31 January 1970

**Duties:** Helicopter Crewman



Private First Class Clausen distinguished himself on 31 January 1970 while serving with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 during a helicopter rescue mission to extract elements of a platoon which had inadvertently entered a minefield while attacking enemy positions. Pfc. Clausen skillfully guided the helicopter pilot to a landing in an area cleared by one of several mine explosions. With 11 marines wounded, one dead, and the remaining eight marines holding their positions for fear of detonating other mines, Pfc. Clausen quickly leaped from the helicopter and, in the face of enemy fire, moved across the extremely hazardous mine laden area to assist in carrying casualties to the waiting helicopter and in placing them aboard. Despite the ever-present threat of further mine explosions, he continued his valiant efforts, leaving the comparatively safe area of the helicopter on six separate occasions to carry out his rescue efforts. On one occasion while he was carrying one of the wounded, another mine detonated, killing a corpsman and wounding three other men. Only when he was certain that all marines were safely aboard did he signal the pilot to lift the helicopter. By the courageous, determined and inspiring efforts in the face of the utmost danger, Pfc. Clausen upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the U.S. Naval Service.

## Crandall, Bruce P.

**Rank:** Major

**Organization:** U.S. Army

**Company:** A/229th Assault Helicopter Company

**Division:** 1st Cavalry Division

**Place / Date:** Ia Drang Valley, Republic of Vietnam, 14 November 1965

**Duties:** Helicopter Pilot



Major Bruce P. Crandall distinguished himself on 14 November 1965 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 that day, 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 U.S. Army.



## Ferguson, Frederick Edgar

Rank: Chief Warrant Officer

Organization: U.S. Army

Company: C/227th Aviation Battalion

Division: 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division

Place / Date: Hue, Republic of Vietnam, January 31, 1969

Duties: Helicopter Pilot



Chief Warrant Officer Ferguson distinguished himself on 31 January 1969 while serving with Company C, 227<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Airmobile). CWO Ferguson, commander of a resupply helicopter monitoring an emergency call from wounded passengers and crewmen of a downed helicopter under heavy attack within the enemy controlled city of Hue, unhesitatingly volunteered to attempt evacuation. Despite warnings from all aircraft to stay clear of the area due to heavy antiaircraft fire, CWO Ferguson began a low-level flight at maximum airspeed along the Perfume River toward the tiny, isolated South Vietnamese Army compound in which the crash survivors had taken refuge. Coolly and skillfully maintaining his course in the face of intense, short range fire from enemy occupied buildings and boats, he displayed superior flying skill and tenacity of purpose by landing his aircraft in an extremely confined area in a blinding dust cloud under heavy mortar and small-arms fire. Although the helicopter was severely damaged by mortar fragments during the loading of the wounded, CWO Ferguson disregarded the damage and, taking off through the continuing hail of mortar fire, he flew his crippled aircraft on the return route through the rain of fire that he had experienced earlier and safely returned his wounded passengers to friendly control. CWO Ferguson's extraordinary determination saved the lives of five of his comrades. His actions are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself and the U.S. Army.

## Fleming, James P.

Rank: 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant

Organization: U.S. Air Force

Company: 20th Special Operations Squadron

Place / Date: Near Duc Co, Republic of Vietnam, January 26, 1968

Duties: Helicopter Pilot



Captain Fleming (then 1st Lt.) distinguished himself on 26 January 1968 as the Aircraft Commander of a UH-1F transport Helicopter from the 20<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron. Capt. Fleming went to the aid of a 6-man Special Forces long range reconnaissance patrol that was in danger of being overrun by a large, heavily armed hostile force. Despite the knowledge that one helicopter had been downed by intense hostile fire, Capt. Fleming descended and balanced his helicopter on a river bank with the tail boom hanging over open water. The patrol could not penetrate to the landing site and he was forced to withdraw. Dangerously low on fuel, Capt. Fleming repeated his original landing maneuver. Disregarding his own safety, he remained in this exposed position. Hostile fire crashed through his windscreen as the patrol boarded his helicopter. Capt. Fleming made a successful takeoff through a barrage of hostile fire and recovered safely at a forward base. Capt. Fleming's profound concern for his fellowmen, and at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Editor's Note: This section is continued on the bottom of page 528



## Freeman, Ed W.

**Rank:** Captain

**Organization:** U.S. Army

**Company:** A/229<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Battalion

**Division:** 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division

**Place / Date:** Ia Drang Valley, Republic of Vietnam, November 14, 1965

**Duties:** Helicopter Pilot



Captain Ed W. Freeman distinguished himself on 14 November 1965 by numerous acts of conspicuous gallantry and extraordinary intrepidity while serving with Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). As a flight leader and second in command of a 16-helicopter lift unit, he supported a heavily engaged American infantry battalion at Landing Zone X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley, Republic of Vietnam. The unit was almost out of ammunition after taking some of the heaviest casualties of the war, fighting off a relentless attack from a highly motivated, heavily armed enemy force. When the infantry commander closed the helicopter landing zone due to intense direct enemy fire, Captain Freeman risked his own life by flying his unarmed helicopter through a gauntlet of enemy fire time after time, delivering critically needed ammunition, water and medical supplies to the besieged battalion.... Editor's Note: This citation and section continues online at <https://directory.vhpa.org>