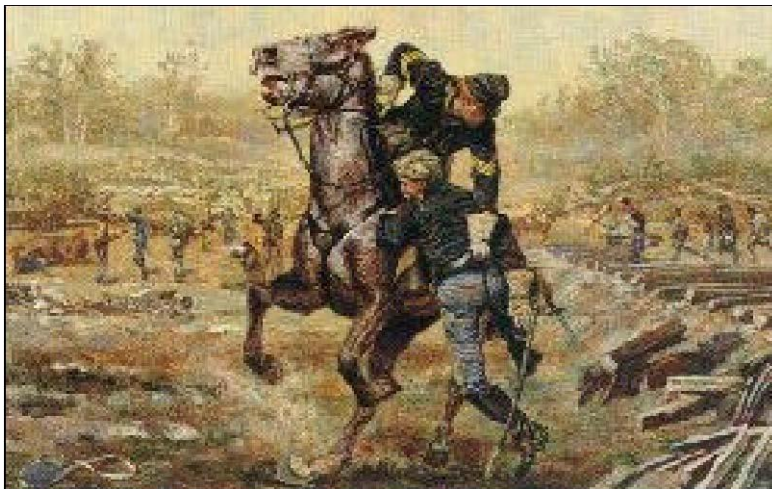


Remarkable Sergeants: Ten Vignettes of Noteworthy NCOs

By CSM Dan Elder



Sergeant's Valor

Artwork by Don Stivers

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Ask most soldiers to name ten distinguished military figures and you will probably get a list of greats like Washington, Grant, Pershing, Patton, Eisenhower to name a few, but how many enlisted soldiers will be on the list? Other than York, Murphy, Shughart and Gordon, the names of noteworthy noncommissioned officers are sometimes elusive or not as easily recalled. One problem, if you can call it such, is the military tradition of commissioning the great NCOs, those like Samuel Woodfill, who was Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing's favorite doughboy, whom he called the "outstanding soldier" of the American Expeditionary Force. A career noncom with service as a first sergeant, he was temporarily promoted to captain and was awarded the Medal of Honor for singlehandedly killing 28 Germans. Woodfill never received the fame of Sergeant Alvin York, another Medal winner from the War, and reentered after the war at his NCO rank and retired with a sergeant's pension. He was one of three soldiers selected to serve as pallbearer to carry the first Unknown to Arlington Cemetery in 1921. Woodfill eventually returned for World War II and achieved promotion to major.

The history of our Army is forever tied to the great military leaders in the commissioned ranks, yet the stories of the enlisted leader, the noncommissioned officer, are still being told. Other heroic noncommissioned officers who were rewarded for their bravery with battlefield commissions were leaders like Commissary Sergeant William McKinley (later President) of the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry who distinguished himself during the Battle of Antietam for getting needed rations to his men during the heat of battle. Or First Sergeant, and later Army Chief of Staff, Adna Chaffee, of K Troop, 6th Cavalry. Some noteworthy noncommissioned officers would go on to serve the Army with a commission, yet those below are but a few seldom-told stories of noncoms.

Without a doubt there are those noncommissioned officers who have endured and sacrificed much on the battlefields for our nation. Just the Medal of Honor rolls alone would produce many memorable NCOs, of which I do not intend to diminish their sacrifices by my omission. Hopefully these 10 will pique the interest in others to come up with their own list of memorable NCOs, or to learn more about the contributions to our nation of these mentioned.

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Daniel Bissell:

Daniel Bissell, the eldest son of Daniel and Elizabeth Bissell of Windsor, Connecticut, was born December 30, 1754. When the Revolution began he enlisted in the 2nd Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Line, where his "sterling qualities of head and heart speedily gained the esteem of his comrades and the confidence of his officers." He served through the war with credit and was present at the battle of White Plains, and also at Trenton and Monmouth, the latter where he was wounded in the cheek.¹

In 1871 Bissell was directed to New York by Regimental Commander Col. Heman Swift to pose as a deserter and gather vital information, and sent him to Col. David Humphrey for instructions. Upon his arrival in New York on August 13th, he learned that British General Henry Clinton had ordered that deserters would not be protected, so he joined Benedict Arnold's Loyalist Army with the intent on gathering data on the troop strength and the state of enemy forces. He became ill and was not able to return to his Regiment, so he served as a quartermaster sergeant until 13 months later in September 1782 when he was finally able to escape.



Upon his return Bissell spent two days writing down the information he gathered. He was informed that Swift could not reward him with a commission as he intended, as Congress had directed no more commissions be given. Bissell noted he was asked:

"if I wished to be discharged from service. I told the Col. [Humphrey] I had been in every campaign of the War (and out of health) that my wish was to continue through. I was then asked to join the Invalid Corps and receive a pension. This I declined on the ground, that my Country was poor and it would be of no advantage to me. He said I might do duty or not as I pleased. I went to my Regiment and did orderly sergeant duty until May following, when I obtained permission from his Excellency to go to Susquehannah [sic] And on my return to the regiment I found the last division of the army had been furloughed the day before; my clothes, which I left in the regiment, were all stolen. I found there had been a General Order for me to attend at Head Quarters and receive an honorary certificate and a badge of military merit."

On June 8, 1783, at Washington's headquarters in Newburgh, NY, one month after the first two awards were presented, Sergeant Bissell was noted for his service by being presenting only the third Badge for Military Merit by Jonathan Trumbull Jr., Washington's military secretary. The citation read:

Whereas it hath ever been an established maxim in the American Service, that the Road to Glory was open to all, that Honorary Rewards and Distinctions, were the greatest Stimuli to virtuous actions, and whereas Sergeant DANIEL BISSELL of the Second Connecticut Regiment, has performed some important service, within the immediate knowledge of the Commander-in-Chief, in which his fidelity, perseverance and good sense, were not only conspicuously manifested, but his general line of conduct throughout

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a long course of service, having been not only unspotted but highly deserving of commendation.

Now, therefore, Know Ye, that the aforesaid Sergeant BISSELL, hath fully and truly deserved, and hath been properly invested with, the Honorary Badge of Military Merit, and is entitled to pass and repass all Guards and Military Posts, as freely and as amply any Commissioned Office whatever; and is further recommended to that Notice which a Brave and Faithful Soldier deserves from his Countrymen.

The badge was to be used to recognize distinct honor, as indicated August 7, 1782, when Washington issued the following general order:

"The General, ever desirous to cherish a virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of Military merit, directs that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings, over his left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth, edged with a narrow lace or binding. Not only instances of unusual gallantry, but also of extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way shall meet with due reward."

After the war Bissell served as Paymaster in Col. Bradley's Regiment in 1780² and served in the campaign against the Indians in 1799, known as the *Adams War*. He was then commissioned a first lieutenant in the 16th Regiment of U.S. Infantry on April 17, 1779.

Bissell married Theda Hulbert in 1789 and in 1810 they moved to Richmond, New York. In 1813 Bissell's Badge and the accompanying citation, which he kept with care in the family bible, were lost in a house fire.³ Bissell died August 8, 1824, in Richmond.

Anna (Annie) Etheridge



Born Lorinda Anna Blair in Michigan, she was living in Detroit when the Civil War broke out. Etheridge joined 19 other women in April 1861 who enlisted as vivandiere's (or Daughter of the Regiment) with the Union's 2d Michigan Volunteer Regiment. Prior to the war women did not serve in the military (though some were found masquerading as men), but they occasionally were employed performing duties for military units. It was not until 1861 that vivandiere's, uniformed women, had begun to proliferate.

Many of these vivandiere's would serve in purely ceremonial roles, outfitted in feminine versions of the uniforms of their regiments⁴ (bloomers, which featured a dress over full trousers). Etheridge served as a laundress and was known as "Gentle Annie" and later "Michigan Annie." After a period of training the 2d Michigan shipped out for Washington D.C. to join the Potomac Army and Etheridge was the last of the original 20 still with the unit.⁵ When the 2d Michigan first saw action at Blackburn's Ford, Etheridge was reported to have

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nursed the wounded and to have brought water to the dying. She served with the Regiment throughout its battles, including both at Bull Run. It was at the second where she came to the attention of Maj. Gen. Philip Kearney, Commander of the 1st Division of Maj. Gen. Samuel P. Heitzelman's III Corps. She had almost been captured while attending to the wounded when Kearny recommended she be given a horse, and promoted to the rank of sergeant for her bravery. She got the horse, however Kearny was soon killed when he rode into the enemy lines during the Battle of Chantilly. Etheridge would never receive the deserved promotion to sergeant.

After Antietam the 2nd Michigan was relocated to the Army of the West and Etheridge transferred to the 3rd, and later 5th, Michigan Regiments in order to stay with the Army of the Potomac. In his history of 116th Regiment at Gettysburg, Bvt. Maj. Gen. St. Clair A. Mulholland wrote

"While passing the Trossell House, a woman on horseback and in uniform galloped back from the line of battle...she was a nurse from the Third Corps, Anna Etheridge, and was directing the removal of the wounded."⁷



At Chancellorsville, Etheridge was wounded in the hand when a Union officer attempted to hide behind her, and he was ultimately killed and her horse wounded. For her courage under fire, Etheridge was one of only two women awarded the Kearny Cross, named in honor of Gen. Kearney. During that era there were few officially recognized decorations, other than the Medal of Honor, first awarded on March 25, 1863. However, on March 13, 1863 Brig. Gen. David B. Birney, Kearny's replacement, issued an order to the effect that a "Cross of Valor to be known as the 'Kearny Cross', would be bestowed upon such noncommissioned officers and privates who most distinguished themselves in battle."

General Orders Number 48 dated May 16, 1863, announced the award of 500 medals, to include Mrs. Anna Etheridge of the 5th Michigan Volunteers and Mrs. Mary Tepe of the 114th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Etheridge returned to Detroit with her Regiment at the war's end until mustered out in July 1865. She married a soldier, and earned a \$25 per month pension for her military service. She died in 1913 and was buried in Arlington Cemetery.

William H. Carney

Born in 1840 to a slave mother in Norfolk, Virginia, who was later freed upon her owner's death in 1854, William H. Carney eventually settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts and prepared himself to enter the ministry.⁸ In 1863 the Union Army began to organize colored units, and one of the first was the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, organized at Camp Meigs. Carney was one of 47 African Americans recruited from New Bedford.⁹ Carney joined up and was assigned to Company C. In an 1863 interview for the *Liberator* magazine Carney explained his reasons for joining.

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"Previous to the formation of colored troops, I had a strong inclination to prepare myself for the ministry; but when the country called for all persons, I could best serve my God serving my country and my oppressed brothers. The sequel is short -- I enlisted for the war."

The 54th, along with the 1st North Carolina Colored Volunteers (redesignated the 35th United States Colored Troops (USCT) in 1864) were the object of great interest and curiosity, and their performance would be considered an important indication of the possibilities of using negro's in war.¹⁰ The 54th largely consisted of free blacks, primarily from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and the 1st was made up of ex-slaves from the coastal areas of Virginia and the Carolinas.



Though late to the war, the 54th soon saw action at James Island in June 1863. But it was on July 18, 1863, that Carney would distinguish himself and cause his Regiment to be widely known.

While leading the attack on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, the 54th was repulsed and Regimental commander Col. Robert G. Shaw was mortally wounded. In this desperate attack, the 54th was placed in the lead and 281 men of the regiment became casualties (54 were killed or fatally wounded and another 48 were never accounted for). Shaw died on the crest of the enemy parapet, shouting, "Forward, Fifty-fourth!" According to Carney's Medal of Honor citation:

"When the color sergeant was shot down, this soldier [Carney] grasped the flag, led the way to the parapet, and planted the colors thereon. When the troops fell back he brought off the flag, under a fierce fire in which he was twice severely wounded."

As Carney handed the flag over to other survivors of the 54th, he told them, "Boys, I only did my duty. The old flag never touched the ground." Those words inspired a 1901 song by Bob Cole, James Weldon Johnson, and J. Rosamond Johnson commemorating Carney's heroism titled "The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground."¹²

The bravery of Carney was duly recognized in his being awarded the Medal of Honor, the first ever conferred to an African-American. However it was not presented to Carney until May 20 1900. After leaving the service in 1865, Carney eventually returned to Massachusetts where he worked as a mail carrier in New Bedford. He died in 1908. Today, the flag he saved is preserved in Boston's Memorial Hall and Carney's home is known as the Sergeant Carney Memorial House.



Irving Berlin

Born Israel Baline, on May 11 1888, Irving Berlin and his family immigrated from Tolochin, Belorussia, to the United States in 1893. By age 14 he began singing popular songs on street

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corners and in restaurants in order to help support the family after his father died. He worked as a singing waiter at a café in Chinatown and learned to pick out tunes on an upright piano, never fully learning how to read music. In 1911 he wrote "Alexander's Ragtime Band," a song that made him a renowned celebrity.

In 1917 Berlin was drafted and stationed at Camp Upton on Yaphank, Long Island, New York, a replacement depot for men enroute overseas. While at Camp Upton, he "sincerely wanted to be a good soldier," but Berlin was not one for the Army life, and even recalled having his valet who was down for a visit make his bunk and polish his issue items while he was in the field at drill. He admitted "I really wasn't fitted to be a soldier. I was a songwriter. I knew entertainment."¹³ Berlin eventually incorporated his dislike of the military life by penning the song "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," with its threats to "murder the bugler." It quickly caught on with the soldiers and it was packaged commercially. The sheet music was inscribed "Dedicated to my friend 'Private Howard Friend' who occupies the cot next to mine and feels as I do about the 'bugler'."¹⁴ It was Berlin's first hit war song.



As those who had arrived with Berlin began to ship out to France, Berlin was promoted to sergeant. Maj. Gen. J. Franklin Bell, the camp's commander, ordered Berlin to his office and explained, "we want a new community house ... a place where friends and relatives of you men can be made a little more comfortable when they come to visit. It could cost a lot, perhaps thirty-five thousand dollars, and we thought perhaps you could put on a little show to make money." Recalling a similar Navy production, he began to write a musical, *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*, which was to be performed by army personnel. The musical included "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," which Berlin himself sang.

He also wrote a song he called "God Bless America," however, Berlin decided it was somewhat out of keeping with the more comedic elements of the show and the song was laid aside.¹⁵ It would not be until the possibility of a new war in Europe that Berlin would release his song, slightly rewritten, sung by Kate Smith during her Armistice Day radio broadcast in 1938. *Yip, Yip, Yaphank* ended up a success, raising \$80,000 dollars.

Berlin was discharged in 1919 and went on to form his own music publishing firm, the Irving Berlin Music Company. The philosophy developed by Berlin of entertainment for the soldier, by the soldier was reincarnated during World War II as he directed and produced "This is the Army." Cast and crewmembers belonged to the U.S. Army Special Services Company #1. A film version was released in 1943 and featured a military cast, which included Ronald Regan, Gene Kelly and Joe Louis,¹⁶ which raised \$10 million dollars for the Army Emergency Relief. His legacy still endures today through the Army Soldier Show, sponsored by the Army Community and Family Support Center's Army Entertainment Detachment as a 90-minute live



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musical review, showcasing the talents of active duty soldiers from throughout the Army. Irving Berlin died on September 22, 1989, at age 101.

Edward A. Carter



Born to missionary Rev. E.A. Carter and his wife Mary during a brief visit home to Los Angeles, California, the Carter family soon returned to Calcutta with young "Eddie." When they later moved to Shanghai the younger Carter attended military school until his parents divorced. He ran off and joined the Chinese Nationalist Army fighting the Japanese until his father notified authorities that his son was not yet 18, and he was released.¹⁷

He did not stick around long...he hopped a ride on a ship to Manila and tried without luck to join the U.S. Army. Instead, he ended up in Europe and joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, an American volunteer unit supporting the Spanish Loyalists who were fighting Gen. Francisco Franco's fascists reign during the Spanish Civil War.¹⁸ Carter stayed in Spain for over two years, seeing combat and at one time being captured, only to later escape. In 1938 Carter fled to France with the Loyalists and eventually returned to the United States. He entered the US Army September 26, 1941, and was shipped to Camp Wolters, Texas. His experiences impressed his instructors and he was promoted to Staff Sergeant in less than a year. He shipped out to Fort Benning, Georgia, and despite his extensive combat experience he was assigned to the 3535th Quartermaster Truck Company as a cook, as it was a belief held by many that blacks could not be relied on in combat.¹⁹

His unit shipped out to Europe and by November 1944 they were transporting much needed supplies. In 1945 replacements were desperately needed and the prohibition on blacks in combat units was lifted and Carter joined 2,800 other volunteers, which caused him to lose his coveted sergeant's stripes and revert back to a private. Carter was one of the first of the groups selected, organized with the Seventh Army Provisional Infantry Company No. 1, and assigned to the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. Company commander Capt. Floyd Vanderhoff made two decisions about him... he gave Carter his staff sergeant stripes back and then made him a squad leader of Infantry.

It was shortly afterwards that on March 23, 1945, while riding on a Sherman tank near Speyer, Germany, Carter's detachment ran into heavy bazooka and small arms fire. He voluntarily dismounted and attempted to lead a three-man group across an open field. Within a short time, two of his men were killed and the third was seriously wounded. Carter continued toward the enemy emplacement alone. He was wounded five times and was finally forced to take cover. When eight enemy riflemen attempted to capture him, Carter killed six of them and captured the remaining two. He then returned across the field, using his two prisoners as a shield, obtaining

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from them valuable information on the disposition of enemy troops.²⁰ For his actions, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nations second highest award for valor, only one of nine awarded to black soldiers for heroism in that war.²¹

Carter returned to civilian life and his wife and family in Los Angeles for a short time, and then re-entered the service at his previous rank. He was soon promoted to Sergeant First Class, and transferred to Fort Lewis, Washington. When Carter's enlistment was about to expire, to his surprise, he was denied re-enlistment "without the specific permission of the adjutant general of the Army." Carter was stunned. He paid his own way to Washington to see the adjutant general's office to ask why he couldn't re-enlist and got nowhere. Meanwhile his enlistment ended September 21, 1949.²² Evidently, Carter's service with the Lincoln Brigade and his possible exposure to communism caused Army officials to keep watch on him throughout his service. After the war a wave of anti-communism swept Carter up in its net. Despite two of his commanders who recommended the matter be dropped as groundless and after an extensive investigation, the Army never found evidence that Carter was a communist or in any way disloyal.²³

Carter died of lung cancer on January 30, 1963 and was buried in the National Cemetery in Los Angeles never knowing the full reason he was not able to continue his career, and there it may have ended. However, in 1995 the Army undertook a study to determine why no black soldier in World War II earned the Medal of Honor, and focused on nine, including Carter, who earned the Distinguished Service Cross. It was later determined that each should have their awards upgraded to highest award.²⁴

In a special service on January 13, 1997, at the White House, Carter's family accepted the medal on his behalf, and on the following day he was interred at Arlington National Cemetery. But it was not until November 10, 1999, after the family pressed the military for answers, Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. John M. Keane told Carter's widow, Mildred in the Pentagon's Hall of Hero's that the Army apologized "to his family for the pain and humiliation he suffered so many years ago at the hands of the his Army and government." She was presented with a new discharge certificate, back dated to September 21, 1949, indicating Carter as fully eligible for re-enlistment.²⁵



On June 12, 2001, the Navy christened the *M/V SSG Edward A. Carter, Jr.* (T-AK 4544), named during a pier side ceremony and reception at Norfolk Shipbuilding & Drydock Corporation.

William Henry (Bill) Mauldin

William Henry Mauldin was born October 29, 1921, in Mountain

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Park, New Mexico. He knew from an early age that he wanted to make cartooning his career, and after high school, began studying toward that goal at Chicago's Academy of Fine Art. While in high school, as many of his friends had, Mauldin had joined the 45th Infantry Division of the National Guard as an Infantryman, which was later mobilized in the fall of 1940. It was during a year of training with the Division that Mauldin began drawing his most famous cartoon characters, Willie and Joe, a pair of nondescript infantryman going through similar training as the 45th Division. Drawing them for a few friends and himself, his work was noticed by the Division newspaper and he began preparing cartoons for the paper. He shipped overseas with the Division to North Africa to take part in OPERATION Torch in 1942.

It was after Torch he was assigned to the staff of the Stars and Stripes newspaper and perfected Willie and Joe... they epitomized the muddy and disheveled grunt. Mauldin's characters changed and matured as they followed the Allies through North Africa, into Sicily and North into Italy. Though Mauldin still spent time with the 45th he also expanded his horizons to include other Divisions, and branches other than infantry. But his focus remained on the fighting man and those soldiers who were in immediate support of them.²⁶

Mauldin's cartoons, part of a series titled "*Up Front with Mauldin*" often reflected his anti-authoritarian views and this got him in trouble with some of the senior officers. In 1945 Gen. George Patton wrote a letter to the *Stars and Stripes* and threatened to ban the newspaper from his Third Army if it did not stop carrying Mauldin's attempts to undermine military discipline. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower did not agree and feared that any attempt at censorship would undermine army morale. He arranged a meeting between Mauldin and Patton in March 1945 where Mauldin had to endure a long lecture on the dangers of producing "anti-officer cartoons." Mauldin responded by arguing that the soldiers had legitimate grievances that needed to be addressed. Mauldin replied of the meeting, "I came out with my hide on. We parted friends, but I don't think we changed each other's mind." When the comment appeared in *Time* magazine Patton was furious and commented that if he came to see Mauldin again he would throw him in jail.²⁷



An Ernie Pyle article about Mauldin prompted United Feature Syndicate to pick up his work in 1944. Shortly afterward, Mauldin's characters were featured in newspapers around the nation. Before the end of the war Mauldin received the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning in 1945, before his 23rd birthday. He would go on to earn a second in 1959. His citation for his war-time Pulitzer read:

"Sergeant Bill Mauldin of *United Feature Syndicate* For distinguished service as a cartoonist, as exemplified by the cartoon entitled, "*Fresh, spirited American troops, flushed with victory, are bringing in thousands of hungry, ragged, battle-weary prisoners,*" in the series entitled, "*Up Front With Mauldin.*"

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He published his first book, *Up Front* in 1945, which reprinted dozens of Willie & Joe cartoons, accompanied by Mauldin's comments on the real-life situation his fictional characters were in. At the wars end he returned to civilian life and continued to write. More books followed, including *Back Home* (1947), *Bill Mauldin in Korea* (1952), *The Brass Ring* (1971), and several others. He also wrote a few short stories, and the 1951 movie, *The Red Badge of Courage*. In 1961 he was awarded The National Cartoonists' Society's Reuben Award as Cartoonist of the Year.

On September 19, 2001, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley presented Mauldin with a personal letter from Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, a hardbound book with notes from other senior Army leaders and several celebrities to include Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw and Tom Hanks. He also promoted Mauldin to the honorary rank of first and presented him SMA and Pentagon 9-11 coins.²⁸

Mauldin died January 22, 2002, in Newport Beach, California, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on January 29th, with honors that included a 21-gun salute, a bugler playing "Taps," and the folding of the flag that covered his casket.

Elvis A. Presley



Sergeant Elvis Aaron Presley, the King of Rock and Roll, served with honor in the 1st Medium Tank Battalion, 32d Armor, 3d Armored Division in Friedburg, Germany as an assistant squad leader.

On March 24, 1958, the "King" became Private Presley when he was inducted into the Army at the Memphis Draft Board. He reported to Fort Hood, Texas, and received basic and advanced training on tanks, Presley chose to serve in the combat arms as an Armored crewman. At the conclusion of his training he was shipped out to the 3d Armored Division in Friedburg, Germany. Presley initially joined Company D, 1-32d Armor at Ray Barracks after arriving via troop ship on October 1 1958. Presley maintained a residence in Bad Nauheim with friends and family, and the next year at a party in his home a mutual friend brought along a guest named Priscilla Ann.

Presley performed his duties as any other trooper. His platoon leader Col. (Ret.) William J. Taylor, Jr. recalled:

"Aside from the fact that our battalion could have gone to war with the Soviets at any time, there are real risks every single day in a combat unit. ...[Elvis] pulled his weight. He used his head and did his job well. He was one of us. He cared about us. And he got back the respect and friendship he gave everyone else. In several instances, I saw sparks of leadership in Elvis that made me think he could have induced men to follow him into combat, just as his music caused millions of young people to follow him."²⁹

On January 20, 1960, and only weeks from discharge, Presley was promoted to sergeant. Upon

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the conclusion of his service he earned a Certificate of Achievement from the Commander of the 3d Armored Division, Maj. Gen. Frederick J. Brown that read:

"In recognition of faithful and efficient performance of duty and for outstanding service to the United States Army."

Presley was officially released on March 5, 1960, and would revive his singing and acting career full-time. In April he began filming on this fifth movie, *G.I. Blues*. The actors all wore the patch of the 3d Armored Division, and part of the filming was done at Ray Barracks and in Friedburg and employed soldiers of the division. The movie soundtrack album was number one in the country for 10 straight weeks, but remained on the charts for 111, and was one of Presley's most successful albums of his career.

Gen. (Ret) Colin Powell recollected a chance meeting with Presley in his memoirs years later:

"One morning during maneuvers, we had come upon a scout jeep from another unit parked on a narrow road near Gießen. 'Hey Lieutenant.' one of my men shouted, 'Come on over. Look who's here.' I walked over to the jeep, where a grimy, weary-looking sergeant saluted me and put out his hand. It was Elvis Presley. What impressed me at the time was that instead of seeking celebrity treatment, Elvis had done his two-year hitch, uncomplainingly, as an ordinary GI, even rising to the responsibility of an NCO."³⁰



After a long, successful career, Presley died at 42 on August 16 1977. Originally buried in Forrest Hill Cemetery, he was moved to a plot at his Graceland Mansion, Memphis, Tennessee.

Mildred C. Kelly



Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee on January 24, 1928, to the Rev. Willie E. Kelly and Maxie D. Kelly, Mildred C. Kelly did not immediately join the military right out Howard High School, but went on to earn a Bachelor's of Science Degree in chemistry and mathematics from Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee. From 1974 through 1976, Kelly continued her post-graduate studies at American University and George Washington University, both in Washington, D.C.

Before enlisting Kelly taught high school chemistry.

In 1950 she enlisted in the United States Army Women's Army Corps at Fort Lee, Virginia where she did basic training, clerical and leadership training.³¹ An adventurous young woman, Kelly set her goal towards making it to the top of the rank structure and become a first sergeant (E-7). It was not until the Military Pay Bill of 1958

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that two new grades were added to the enlisted ranks and enlisted soldiers could aspire for higher opportunities.

Though President Harry S. Truman had signed Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, which provided for equal opportunity and treatment in the Armed Forces, it was not until the Secretary of Defense announced September 30, 1954, that the last all-black unit would be abolished that segregation officially ended in the military. Even so, the Army remained divided for women, with females only allowed to serve as WACs until October 20, 1978, when President Jimmy Carter signed into law PL 95584 which abolished WAC as a separate corps.

Her first assignment was at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Kelly then became a Personnel Clerk at the United States Finance Center in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1954 she was assigned to Japan where she served as a Personnel Sergeant until May 1956 and then returned to Fort McClellan, Alabama. In 1959, she reenlisted and was promoted to Management Specialist, US WAC Center and transferred to the US Army Ordnance Center and School at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. While at Aberdeen, Kelly was promoted to the grade of Staff Sergeant. She later returned to Fort McClellan and went on to form and served on the WAC Drill Team in 1965 to 1966³²

Though the Army promoted women to the new "super-grades," beginning with Carolyn H. James



as both the first women to be promoted to E-8 in 1959 and E-9 in 1960, it would be 13 years before Kelly would be the first African American woman to reach that pinnacle. In 1972 while serving as the WAC Senior NCO advisor for the enlisted personnel directorate, Office of Personnel Operations, Kelly was promoted by Brig. Gen. Jack T. Pink, director of personnel, along with her mother Maxie.

On June 30, 1974, Kelly became the first African American woman to hold the grade and position of Command Sergeant Major, and served at a major Army headquarters at US Army Proving Ground, Aberdeen, Maryland. She believed that "no matter how far you go, you can always look to a higher position."

Kelly retired in 1976 and joined the American Association of Dental Schools where she worked until 1990. She was on hand at the Pentagon when the U.S. Postal Service presented a set of stamps commemorating the 50th anniversary of Army integration on July 20, 1998. At the time of her death, she served on the board of Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc., the Maryland Veterans Commission, and the Veterans' Advisory Board. She died on January 27, 2003, and was buried at Arlington Cemetery.

Melvin C. Lervick

On November 25, 1967, outstanding graduate Staff Sergeant Melvin C. Lervick and 115 newly minted noncommissioned officers crossed the stage in Marshall Auditorium at Fort Benning, Georgia, having completed the first NCO Candidate Course (NCOCC). This new method of

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developing NCOs, at an Army Training Center and not the unit, was a major shift and was developed in order to quickly replenish the small unit leaders needed in Vietnam where the turnover was 200 combat sergeants a week.³³

A native of Billings, Montana, Lervick enlisted in the regular Army in February 1967. It was while attending basic and advanced training at Fort Lewis, Washington, that he was offered a



chance to go to Officers Candidate School (OCS). He went to Fort Benning and after a few weeks realized that not only would he have to go to Vietnam upon graduating, but that he would have an additional six-year obligation in the Reserves after his two-years of active duty was completed. He opted out of OCS, and was sent to a holding company and it was there while waiting their orders that the 160 or so men found out they were selected for the NCO Candidate Course. Making the best of the situation, Lervick realized that he was destined for Vietnam. In the first class the cadre were officers, which would change later to be run by noncommissioned officers. His platoon leader was a gung ho lieutenant who set high standards for his men. Upon entry to the

12-week course all candidates were promoted to E-4. The training was oriented to Vietnam and much of their time was in the field undergoing practical exercises. They learned important techniques in map reading, drill, weapons, physical training and communication. After completing the training 5% were promoted to E-6, with most of the remainder promoted to E-5. They were shipped out for an additional nine weeks of on-the-job training at other training centers. Lervick and three other graduates were offered to attend Ranger school. He later attributed his successful completion of the Ranger training to his NCOCC attendance.

Upon the conclusion of training, Lervick was shipped to Vietnam and reported to the 9th Division and the 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry in the Mekong Delta area where he was assigned duties as a squad leader. With only about three weeks in country Lervick was struck by a sniper bullet that hit him in his left arm and narrowly missed his heart. He spent six months at Madigan General Hospital in Tacoma Washington, and after undergoing two operations and intensive physical therapy; he was medically discharged after two years in the United States Army. Currently, Lervick resides in Redmond, Washington as a software database development engineer with a Bachelors Degree in Electrical Engineering.

Roy P. Benavidez

Of Mexican and Yaqui Indian ancestry, Roy P. Benavidez was born in Lindenau Texas on August 5, 1935. Son of a sharecropper and beset by hardship early in life, his parents passed away by the time he was seven so he and his younger brother moved to El Campo, Texas and were raised by their aunt and uncle. He dropped out of school at the age of 14 and eventually joined the United States Army in June 1955. Benavidez thrived on the discipline and challenges of military life, which his efforts eventually earned him membership in the elite Special Forces. During his first tour of duty in Vietnam in December 1965 he was severely injured by a land

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mine and was not expected to walk again. He was evacuated to Brooke Medical Center in Fort Sam Houston Texas and six-months later walked out under his own power. He later returned to Vietnam.³⁴

It was during his tour with Detachment B56 of the 5th Special Forces Group that Benavidez, then a Staff Sergeant, would distinguish himself.³⁵ While listening to the action of a 12-man Special Forces Reconnaissance Team that was inserted by helicopters in a dense jungle area west of Loc Ninh, Benavidez heard that the team had met heavy enemy resistance and requested emergency extraction. After three tries failed, Benavidez voluntarily boarded a returning helicopter that had just unloaded wounded intent on assisting in another extraction attempt.



Upon arrival, Benavidez realized that all the team members were either dead or wounded and unable to move to the pickup zone. He directed the aircraft to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter, and ran approximately 75 meters under withering small arms fire to the crippled team. Prior to reaching the team's position he was wounded in his right leg, face, and head. Despite these painful injuries, he took charge, repositioning the team members and directing their fire to facilitate the landing of an extraction aircraft, and the loading of wounded and dead team members. He then threw smoke canisters to direct the aircraft to the team's position. Despite his severe wounds and under intense enemy fire, he carried and dragged half of the wounded team members to the awaiting aircraft. He then provided protective fire by running alongside the aircraft as it moved to pick up the remaining team members.

As the enemy's fire intensified, he hurried to recover the body and classified documents on the dead team leader. When he reached the leader's body, Benavidez was severely wounded by small arms fire in the abdomen and grenade fragments in his back. At nearly the same moment, the aircraft pilot was mortally wounded, and his helicopter crashed. Although in extremely critical condition due to his multiple wounds, Sergeant Benavidez secured the classified documents and made his way back to the wreckage, where he aided the wounded out of the overturned aircraft, and gathered the stunned survivors into a defensive perimeter. Under increasing enemy automatic weapons and grenade fire, he moved around the perimeter distributing water and ammunition to his weary men. Facing a buildup of enemy opposition with a beleaguered team, Benavidez began calling in tactical air strikes and directed the fire from supporting gunships to suppress the enemy's fire and so permit another extraction attempt. He was wounded again in his thigh by small arms fire while administering first aid to a wounded team member just before another extraction helicopter was able to land.

Upon reaching the aircraft, he spotted and killed two enemy soldiers who were rushing the craft from an angle that prevented the aircraft door gunner from firing upon them. With little strength remaining, he made one last trip to the perimeter to ensure that all classified material had been collected or destroyed, and to bring in the remaining wounded. Only then, in extremely serious condition from numerous wounds and loss of blood, did he allow himself to be pulled into the

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extraction aircraft.

Although Benavidez's commander felt that he deserved the Medal of Honor for his valor in saving eight lives, he put him in for the Distinguished Service Cross.³⁶ The process for awarding a Medal of Honor would have taken much longer, and he was sure Benavidez would die before he got it. The recommendation for the Distinguish Service Cross was rushed through approval channels and Master Sergeant Benavidez was presented the award by Gen. William C. Westmoreland while he was recovering from his wounds at Fort Sam Houston's Hospital. Years later, his former commander learned that Benavidez had survived the war. The officer also learned more details of the sergeant's mission and concluded that Benavidez merited a higher honor. Years of red tape followed until finally on February 24 1981, President Ronald Reagan told White House reporters "you are going to hear something you would not believe if it were a script." Reagan then read Benavidez's.

Benavidez however, did not regard himself as a hero.³⁷ He said of his actions. "The real heroes are the ones who gave their lives for their country, I don't like to be called a hero. I just did what I was trained to do." President Reagan suggested to Roy that he should make himself available to the youth's of America. Benavidez decided to dedicate his life to helping his fellow veterans and the future leader's of America. He became popular as a speaker and traveled throughout the United States and to foreign countries speaking to civic and military organizations as well as groups of school children. Benavidez has been honored with the naming of the Roy P. Benavidez National Guard Armory in El Campo, Texas, the USNS Benavidez, and was the first Hispanic to have a GI Joe Action figure constructed with his likeness. He is also the first Hispanic to be awarded the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor, which recognized him for his intrepid service, by a member of the State Military Forces of Texas. He died November 29, 1998, at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, and was interred at the Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery, San Antonio, Texas with full military honors.



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¹ Except where noted, major details in this section comes from excerpts of. Stiles, Henry R., The History of Ancient Windsor, Volumes 1 (History) and 2 (Genealogy & Biography), 1976 (facsimile of 1892 edition), New Hampshire Publishing Company, Somersworth, NH 03878, with pages 336-343 reproduced online by Roger Bissell at: <http://hometown.aol.com/BissellGenealogy/Connecticut695DanielIV.html>.

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ⁱ Except where noted, major details in this section comes from excerpts of. Stiles, Henry R., The History of Ancient Windsor, Volumes 1 (History) and 2 (Genealogy & Biography), 1976 (facsimile of 1892 edition), New Hampshire Publishing Company, Somersworth, NH 03878, with pages 336-343 reproduced online by Roger Bissell at: <http://hometown.aol.com/BissellGenealogy/Connecticut695DanielIV.html>.