

MEDAL OF HONOR REMEMBRANCE: SGT. MAJ. KENNETH E. STUMPF

SPECIAL INSERT TO THE REAL MCCOY NEWSPAPER



Medal of Honor Man: Stumpf remembered as mentor, more

BY SCOTT T. STURKOL

Public Affairs Staff

When retired Army Sgt. Maj. Kenneth E. Stumpf passed away at his home in Tomah, Wis., on April 23, his daughter Jobi (Stumpf) Spolum didn't think about how the world lost a military hero — a Medal of Honor recipient. To her, she lost her dad.

Over his 77 years of life, Stumpf was best known to most for his actions on April 25, 1967, in Vietnam, where at that time as a squad leader, Staff Sgt. Stumpf earned the U.S. military's highest honor — the Medal of Honor — for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.”

Spolum is the second of Stumpf's three children. She has an older brother, Scott, and a younger brother, Adrian. She said growing up she didn't realize just how important the Medal of Honor was until she got older.

“To be honest, when I was a kid, it was about him being so good at racquetball,” Spolum said. “He had been on the all-Army team for racquetball. So it was always about what a good athlete he was.

“And then it was when I got older when I learned just how significant the Medal of Honor was,” Spolum said. “When we started going to conventions for Medal of Honor recipients and related events is when it really started to click.”

But at home, Stumpf was dad.

“He and I had a special relationship,” Spolum said.

Stumpf was drafted into the Army in 1965 and served two years with one of those years in Vietnam where he earned the Medal of Honor. He then left the Army and was discharged in 1967 and moved back to his home town of Menasha, Wis. Then he went back to work in a paper mill he'd worked in before the Army.

Not long after, in 1968, Stumpf rejoined the Army on Dec. 16, 1968, but right before that he married his life partner, Dorothy Guralski, at St. Mary Catholic Church in Menasha on Dec. 7, 1968.

“He was always proud of that day,” Spolum said. “He'd always say he got married on Pearl Harbor Day in 1968.”

Pearl Harbor Day, of course, is the remembrance of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Dec. 7, 1941, that propelled the United States into World War II.

Now married and back in the Army, Stumpf embarked on another 27 years of military service where he retired from Fort McCoy on Sept. 30, 1994. He and Dorothy had children Scott in 1969, Jobi in 1972, and Adrian in 1976.

“Ken's strength came from being married (for 46 years) to Dorothy,” his family obituary states. “She was the glue that kept their family close.”

And after getting married, Stumpf completed two more tours in Vietnam between 1969 and 1971. He then served in Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind.; Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; Fort Ord, Calif.; Fort Carson, Colo.; several locations in Germany; Fort Sheridan, Ill.; and finally Fort McCoy.

In 2000, Stumpf was interviewed by James McIntosh for an item now stored in the data collection of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison. Stumpf recalled his time in Vietnam, learning about the Medal of Honor, and more. The transcript of the interview can be found by searching “Stumpf” at <https://wisvetsmuseum.catalogaccess.com>.

“When I had left Vietnam, I knew I was rec-



Photo by Scott T. Sturkol

Jobi (Stumpf) Spolum, management analyst with the Fort McCoy Plans, Analysis, and Information Office, holds the Medal of Honor certificate May 24 at Fort McCoy that was presented to her father, retired Sgt. Maj. Kenneth E. Stumpf, by President Lyndon Johnson. Spolum is a 22-year U.S. Army employee.

ommended for the Medal of Honor,” Stumpf said in the interview six years after he retired from the Army. “But when I left Vietnam, I left Vietnam. I gained a hell of a lot of experience over there. ... I think I became a better person. I became more dedicated to mission.

“I just ... did what I felt was the right thing to do, and I did my duty,” Stumpf said. “One day in my life of the first two years (in the Army) ... I was probably the best Soldier that I could possibly be. I was the best person I could possibly be. You know, go in there and get those guys out ... and the best warrior I could possibly be. That one five-, six-, seven-hour period, I was a good Soldier and the best I could be.”

Spolum said she thinks her dad always tried to be the best Soldier he could be and in turn the best husband and father he could be.

“He always believed in mentoring others,” Spolum said. “When he retired from the Army, he went to work for the county helping inmates complete community service. And then later he worked with a program that helped incarcerated youth. He was kind of like a drill sergeant for them. I remember the graduations where the cadets would come up to him and tell him what an inspiration he was. That's the kind of man

he was.”

Throughout his Army career, besides being a Soldier first, Stumpf worked much of his career in the administrative career field in various functions. Spolum recalls also when her dad served as a first sergeant.

“I remember when my dad was first sergeant for the postal detachment in Germany,” Spolum said. “We had a lot of single Soldiers who lived there, and they would come over to visit and have dinner with us. They were like aunts and uncles to me. ... My dad loved helping and taking care of people.”

In a retirement story written by former Fort McCoy Public Affairs Specialist Rob Shuette in the Oct. 7, 1994, edition of the Triad newspaper, Stumpf said himself that taking care of Soldiers was something he took very seriously.

“I have deep respect for enlisted Soldiers; that's what soldiering is all about,” he said. “My main mission was to take care of the Soldiers. ‘Caring’ and ‘compassion’ are two key words.”

And Soldiers responded to Stumpf — not just for his accomplishments but also because he was a “Soldier's Soldier.”

I had the honor to meet Sgt. Maj. Stumpf a couple times,” said retired Sgt. 1st Class Jaime



Contributed photo

Then-Staff Sgt. Kenneth E. Stumpf is presented the Medal of Honor from President Lyndon Johnson on Sept. 19, 1968, in Washington, D.C.

Herrera, who now serves in an Army civilian position with the Army Reserve Equal Opportunity Office at Fort McCoy. “I had lunch with him and some other noncommissioned officers a few years back. As we sipped beer and told stories, he asked me if I've ever seen combat. I said, ‘Yes, I've been deployed several times.’

“He looked me dead in the eyes and said, ‘I asked if you've ever seen combat,’” Herrera said. “I replied, ‘Yes sergeant major — a lot, and I was wounded once. I was given the Purple Heart, but I'm not a fan. It just means they almost got me.’ He takes a sip and puts his hand on my shoulder and says, ‘No son. It means they tried their f...ing hardest and failed.’ Then he gave me his coin, and I'll never forget that.”

Spolum also said her dad appreciated everyone who served. She said it isn't just military members but everyone, including government civilian service, and more. It's his inspiration in part that encouraged her to serve the last 22 years as an award-winning Army government civilian employee at Fort McCoy.

“I find to be an honor to serve the people who have served my family my entire life,” Spolum said. “That's what my dad believed, and that's something our family will carry on with in his memory.”

The National Medal of Honor Museum paid a special tribute to Stumpf. In the story about him at https://mohmuseum.org/medal_of_honor/kenneth-stumpf, it shows some words by Stumpf that might best have exemplified his character.

“I stayed in the military for twenty-nine years and I never forgot where I came from and that's why I took care of those people underneath me,” Stumpf said in the museum article honoring him. “Because if I don't, who will?”

“Throughout his life, Ken Stumpf remained dedicated to his fellow Vietnam veterans, hearkening back to the time he had spent with them in action.

“Vietnam made me strong,” he said in the article. “I mean, for the guys that got killed, I'm strong for them.”

“And just as he had in Vietnam, where, ‘I laughed a lot, I laughed a lot to keep people cool,’” Stumpf — or “Stumpy,” as his men called him — always displayed his great sense of humor as he shared stories about his time in the service.”

Stumpf will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery alongside his wife Dorothy at a date yet to be determined.

Staff Sgt. Kenneth E. Stumpf Medal of Honor Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Staff Sgt. Stumpf distinguished himself while serving as a squad leader of the 3rd Platoon, Company C, on a search and destroy mission.

As Staff Sgt. Stumpf's company approached a village, it encountered a North Vietnamese rifle company occupying a well-fortified bunker complex. During the initial contact, three men from his squad fell wounded in front of a hostile machinegun emplacement.

The enemy's heavy volume of fire prevented the unit from moving to the aid of the injured men, but Staff Sgt. Stumpf left his secure position in a deep trench and ran through the barrage of incoming rounds to reach his wounded comrades.

He picked up one of the men and carried him back to the safety of the trench. Twice more Staff Sgt. Stumpf dashed forward while the enemy turned automatic weapons and machine guns upon him, yet he managed to rescue the remaining two wounded squad members.

He then organized his squad and led an assault against several enemy bunkers from which continuously heavy fire was being received. He and his squad successfully eliminated two of the bunker positions, but one to the front of the advancing platoon remained a serious threat.

Arming himself with extra hand grenades, Staff Sgt. Stumpf ran over open ground, through a volley of fire directed at him by a determined enemy, toward the machine gun position. As he reached the bunker, he threw a hand grenade through the aperture. It was immediately returned by the occupants, forcing Staff Sgt. Stumpf to take cover.

Undaunted, he pulled the pins on two more grenades, held them for a few seconds after activation, then hurled them into the position, this time successfully destroying the emplacement.

With the elimination of this key position, his unit was able to assault and overrun the enemy.

Staff Sgt. Stumpf's relentless spirit of aggressiveness, intrepidity, and ultimate concern for the lives of his men, are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.



Contributed photos

(Above, below, and right) Staff Sgt. Kenneth E. Stumpf is shown in several portraits before and after he had received the Medal of Honor.





Contributed photo

Stumpf family

This photo from the mid-1970s shows the family of Dorothy and then-Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth E. Stumpf. Pictured are Dorothy, son Adrian, daughter Jobi, son Scott, and Sgt. 1st Class Stumpf. Throughout Stumpf’s 29-year military career, the family was stationed at numerous military installations in both the United States and Europe.



Photo by Catherine Carroll/88th Readiness Division

Supporting new recruits

Mikaila Falash receives an “Our Community Salutes” certificate from Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Kenneth E. Stumpf and Fort McCoy Senior Commander and then-88th Regional Support Command Commanding General Maj. Gen. Patrick Reinert during an “Our Community Salutes” event May 20, 2017, at Fort McCoy. The event recognized and honored graduating high school seniors who committed to enlist in the armed forces following high school graduation. Stumpf was a regular attendee for these events.



Photo by Catherine Carroll/88th Readiness Division

Community Salutes

Medal of Honor recipient retired Sgt. Maj. Kenneth E. Stumpf, alongside 88th Readiness Division Commanding General Maj. Gen. Patrick Reinert and Army Reserve Ambassador for Wisconsin Gerald W. Meyer, hands out certificates to recent enlistees during the Our Community Salutes event on Armed Forces Day on May 19, 2018, at Fort McCoy, Wis. Community Salutes honors graduating high school seniors who have enlisted in the armed forces.



Photo by Scott T. Sturkol

Vietnam veterans welcomed home

Retired Sgt. Maj. Kenneth E. Stumpf, Vietnam veteran and Medal of Honor recipient, stands with Vietnam veterans and their families during the Vietnam Veterans Welcome Home Ceremony on May 20, 2017, at Fort McCoy. Each veteran received a Vietnam Veterans Lapel Pin during the event. The ceremony was held in conjunction with the 2017 Fort McCoy Armed Forces Day Open House and Stumpf stood for photos with every Vietnam veteran who attended.

FROM THE FORT MCCOY NEWSPAPER ARCHIVES

(Reprinted from Oct. 7, 1994, edition of the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper. The paper was renamed back to The Real McCoy in 2008.)

Stumpf reflects on 29-year career

Sergeant major, MOH recipient, led troops by example

BY ROB SCHUETTE

Triad Staff

Developing leadership abilities is the best way for enlisted soldiers and NCOs to get ahead in today's Army, said the nation's last active-duty enlisted Medal of Honor recipient.

Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Stumpf, retiring sergeant major of the Fort McCoy Readiness Group, was a private first class when he arrived in Vietnam in 1966. Seven months later, he became a staff sergeant.

"I went up the ladder quickly, even during a time of war," he said. "I never ran from leadership responsibility."

Stumpf said he also never asked for special favors because he received the Medal of Honor, or thought it made him a better person than the people he served with. Most of the Medal of Honor recipients he knows are the same way — quiet and unassuming.

"I'm not God's gift to the NCO corps because I received the Medal of Honor," Stumpf said. "I've always done the best job I could do and tried to lead by example. I only asked three things from the Soldiers I served with — to be on time for work and give me your best shot and take pride in your work. In turn, I'll take care of you and make it work; we both win for the unit."

Vietnam played a large role in shaping his attitudes toward NCOs and officers, Stumpf said. While younger officers earned his admiration for being side-by-side with the enlisted personnel during the fighting, the more-senior officers were in their command centers or flying above a



Sgt. Maj. Kenneth E. Stumpf

triple-layered jungle canopy.

Consequently, the senior officers didn't have first-hand knowledge like those in previous wars did, and were mapping strategy while being unaware of the "real war," he said.

"I was a private first class when I took over a squad," he said. "It was an awesome responsibility."

The young soldiers were, and are, the heart and soul of the military. They're the ones who

bleed first and bleed the most."

In Vietnam, approximately 28,000 Army personnel were killed, and more than 26,000 first-termers were killed.

On April 25, 1967, Spc. Stumpf, a squad leader, and his six squad members, encountered a Vietnamese rifle company occupying a fortified bunker complex, according to the Congressional Citation for the Medal of Honor.

During the initial contact, three Soldiers were wounded. Stumpf left a secure position, and moving through heavy enemy gunfire carried each man, in turn, to safety. He then led his squad against enemy bunker positions and eliminated two of them. Heavy fire continued from another bunker.

Arming himself with extra hand grenades, Stumpf threw a hand grenade through the aperture. It was immediately returned and forced him to take cover.

Undaunted, Stumpf pulled the pines on two grenades, held the grenades for several seconds and then threw them in the bunker, successfully eliminating the emplacement.

With the elimination of this position, his unit was able to assault and overrun the enemy.

"I feel the Medal of Honor isn't mine alone or something that I earned," he said. "The people in my squad earned it for me. It belongs to all those who wore the uniform and made sacrifices. I served to pay back the veterans who served before me and allowed me to grow up in a free society."

Staff Sgt. Stumpf left the military in 1967 and returned to the paper mill he used to work in

near his home town of Menasha, Wis. It wasn't until after he received the Medal of Honor that he decided to re-enter the military and make it a career.

Before he was allowed to serve two subsequent tours, Stumpf said he had to overcome hesitancy by to military hierarchy to sending a Medal of Honor recipient back to Vietnam.

"I have deep respect for enlisted Soldiers; that's what soldiering is all about," he said. "My main mission was to take care of the Soldiers. 'Caring' and 'compassion' are two key words."

Stumpf considers the highlights of his 29-year military career to be the Combat Infantryman's Badge, the Purple Heart, and the combat patch he wears on his right shoulder.

Stumpf said he wouldn't change anything in his career, although he might reconsider making the military a career if he were enlisting today because of the reduced benefits.

"I love the Army, and I am going to miss the young Soldiers so bad," he said. "Somehow, I found a way to get the Soldiers to do the right things for me. Sometimes it took a lot of work and counseling."

Stumpf said he enjoys doing volunteer work with area veterans and will continue to do it in retirement.

Stumpf and his wife, Dorothy, plan to live in the Tomah area after his retirement. He will perform public relations work for a Wisconsin Rapids architectural, engineering, and surveying firm, and will continue to play racquetball, a sport that earned him all-Army honors in 1981.

Medal of Honor: Enlisted recipient Stumpf retires from Army

BY ROB SCHUETTE

Triad Staff

More than 400 people made a community effort at Fort McCoy Sept. 30 to honor the retirement of the military's last enlisted active-duty soldier to have received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award.

Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Stumpf of Readiness Group-Fort McCoy, who ended 29 years of military service that included three tours in Vietnam, was visibly moved by an audience who gave him two standing ovations.

As he began his remarks, Stumpf introduced three other Medal of Honor recipients, Eina Ingman from the Korean era, and Col. Walter Mann and retired Lt. Col. Roger Donlon — who both served in Vietnam.

"When I was drafted in 1965, I never envisioned I would become a sergeant major and serve 29 years," Stumpf said. "Today, I leave with pride, respect and some regrets."

The pride came from what the Soldiers have achieved together, he said.

Soldiers have earned his respect by their dedicated and loyal service. History has taught the country that being prepared to go to war is the best way to keep the peace, he added.

Stumpf expressed regret he would no longer be able to share the triumphs, challenges and especially camaraderie with his fellow Soldiers.

"I especially want to thank my fellow Vietnam veterans," he said. "You gave everything you had. I'm proud to be one of you and to have served on the same battlefields."

To the enlisted personnel and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), Stumpf said they were the heart and soul of the military. Although they were of lesser rank, that did not mean they were lesser soldiers.

Stumpf thanked his wife, Dorothy, and their three children, Scott, 25, Jobi, 21, and Adrian, 19, for their support over the years. He also thanked his platoon leader in Vietnam, who taught him the real meaning of caring for Soldiers.

Forces Command (FORSCOM) Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Cayton said Stumpf set a good example and cared about his Soldiers.

"He is what we NCOs are all about, the cornerstone and back-



Contributed photo

Jobi (Stumpf) Spolum is shown with her father, Sgt. Maj. Kenneth E. Stumpf, around the time of his Army retirement.

bone of the Army," Cayton said. "Sergeant Major Stumpf never took the easy way out. He saw the good in Soldiers and continued to see the good as he helped them become successful."

Two things made Stumpf successful in his career, Cayton said.

When Stumpf entered military service, he was fully aware of and accepted the hazards of the profession, Cayton said.

Stumpf also pledged to always uphold the prestige, honor, and high esprit de corps for his Soldiers and country, which he did, Cayton said.

"It epitomizes where he started his career," Cayton said. "He was trained by NCOs who served in World War II and Korea. He led the Soldiers in Vietnam from the front. He and his wife touched many thousands of Soldiers throughout his tour at Readiness Group."

First Army Commander Lt. Gen. John P. Otjen said Stumpf deserved the respect and admiration not only of everyone at his ceremony, but also the entire nation.

"Sergeant Major Stumpf defines who we are, what we believe in, and what we stand for," he said.

"He's an example of what Soldiers can do when they turn fear to courage and transfer that courage to action. I'm delighted to recognize and honor him because he's not only an American hero, but a Wisconsin hero."

For 29 years, Stumpf, a native of Menasha, Wis., gave selfless service in mentoring, leadership, comradeship, and friendship. Otjen said Stumpf's service allowed others to live in peace and freedom.

"We truly don't know how to adequately express our admiration," Otjen said. "You'll never leave our hearts, and the nation always will be in your debt."

At the ceremony, Stumpf was presented with the Legion of Merit, a certificate of appreciation, and a retirement certificate. His wife received a certificate of appreciation and 26 roses, one for each year of marriage.