

NEWS-HERALD

Memorial to county's Medal of Honor winner to be dedicated on Veteran' Day

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Sgt. Mitchell W. Stout, Loudon County's only winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, will be honored for his heroism once again when a memorial is dedicated to him on Veteran's Day, Nov. 11 at 11 a.m. in front of the Loudon County Courthouse.

Stout posthumously received the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism after he threw himself on a grenade to save his comrades at the height of the Vietnam War.

Stout was born Feb. 24, 1950. He grew up around Dixie Lee Junction, attending Highland Park Elementary in his early years and moving on through the system up to Lenoir City High School.

According to Ken Shockley, "his senior year . . . [he] started bouncing around trying to [figure] out what to do with his life." Stout's parents divorced when he was young, and so after leaving high school - just shy of graduation - he went to visit his father, Jack, "who had been transferred to Sanford, N.C." Stout figured while he was there he would enlist in the U.S. Army. He would soon serve his country - Battery C, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery Unit.

He began his first tour in Vietnam, however, a short while before, accompanying the 1st Platoon, 9th Infantry Division. His second tour began five weeks prior to Friday, Jan. 30, 1970, according to information compiled by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society (CMOHS). But it was less than three months later, on March 12, 1970, when his tour and his life ended at Khe Gio Bridge.

Khe Gio Bridge was "overrun by North Vietnamese troops" that night and Stout was among the two casualties of the 14-soldier unit, of which another five were wounded and another was captured, notes Don Wittenberger, author of "The Battle of Khe Gio Bridge." Wrote Wittenberger, "The enemy's plan was to sneak into the perimeter, pin down the defenders with rocket and mortar fire, and kill them in bunkers with grenades and explosives. The strength of the assaulting force was in the range of 150 to 400 troops. For the 11 U.S. survivors, [four] of whom would have died if a squad leader had not sacrificed himself to save them from a grenade, it was a terrifying experience."

Stout was those four men's savior that night.

A North Vietnamese Army Sapper company bombarded the bunker in which Stout's unit was positioned. Notes the CMOHS, "When the intensity of the mortar attack subsided, an enemy grenade was thrown into the bunk." Stout, the society continued, ran to retrieve it, tucking the grenade into his abdomen so as to absorb the inevitably fatal explosion as he ran toward the door . . . Sacrificing his life for the protection of his fellow soldiers.

For Stout's "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action . . . [and] keeping with the highest traditions of the military service," he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, which was given by then Vice-President Gerald Ford to his mother and father, the parents of Loudon County's "own son."

Today, 38 years later, Stout's name can be read on the sign of the bridge on Interstate 75 nearest Highway 72 and on Panel 13W, Row 121 on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. Veteran's Day it will also be on the memorial on the Loudon County Courthouse Lawn.

Congressman John J. Duncan is scheduled to attend the Veteran's Day ceremony along with other local officials including. The Lenoir City High School Band and Chorus are are also on the program