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Jerry Summers



# Jerry Summers: Mitchell William Stout - Vietnam Hero

📅 Thursday, October 28, 2021    👤 Jerry Summers

The next time you have to travel on I-75 to Knoxville to watch the Tennessee Volunteers play or to journey to the Smokies to visit Dollywood, or for any other reasons, slow down and pause for a few moments to identify the small sign on the bridge across the highway in Loudon County and pay homage to another Tennessee hero.

Mitchell William Stout was born on February 24, 1950 in Knoxville, Tennessee but lived in Loudon County prior to enlisting in the United States Army at the age of 17 in Raleigh, North Carolina. He had finished three years at Lenoir City High School before dropping out and joining the Army in 1967.

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He had gone through paratrooper school and had earned his wings before the Army discovered his true age of 17 and discharged him. By the time of his discharge, he was 18 years of age and due to his desire to be a soldier he simply re-enlisted.

He was deployed for his first tour of Vietnam in 1968 and returned home safely in 1969.



In his first tour of duty after serving a year in Germany he requested duty to Vietnam and in 1968-1969 he was wounded by shrapnel from a mortar round and was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

In an act of patriotism in this era of turmoil and efforts by many young men to avoid military service and the War in that area of Asia, Michael volunteered for a second tour "in order to guide younger soldiers," despite the protests of his mother and sister. He defended the war saying it was a "worthwhile cause."

Ironically, it was a concern about the men that he had left behind in jungles and rice paddies of Southeast Asia that was a strong motivation factor in his re-enlistment.

Like all sergeants he was leery of leadership by "green untested lieutenants" who would be in charge of his men.

He had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant in Battery C, 1st Battalion 44<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment. On March 12, 1970, Stout picked up an enemy thrown hand grenade and used his body to shield his fellow soldiers at the expense of his own life at the Khe Glo Bridge in the Republic of Vietnam.

Three weeks after his 20th birthday and only a few weeks into his second tour, Stout gave his life for his fellow soldiers and country.

At the time Mitchell was the only Army Air Defense artillery man in history to receive the heralded Medal of Honor.

He told his family prior to signing up for a second tour, "If it ever comes to a choice of my life or my men, there won't be any question. It will be my life."

Unfortunately, on March 12, 1970 his prophecy became a reality.



The citation for the Medal of Honor which was awarded post-humorously states:

Sgt. Stout distinguished himself during an attack by a North Vietnamese Army Sapper company on his unit's firing position at Khe Glo Bridge, Sgt. Stout was in a bunker with members of a searchlight crew when the position came under heavy enemy mortar fire and ground attack. When the intensity of the mortar attack subsided, an enemy grenade was thrown into the bunker. Displaying great courage, Sgt. Stout ran to the grenade, picked it up, and started out of the bunker. As he reached the door, the grenade exploded. By holding the grenade close to his body and shielding its blast, he protected his fellow soldiers in the bunker from further injury or death. Sgt. Stout's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action, at the cost of his own life, are in keeping with the highest tradition of the Military service and reflect great credit upon him, his unit and the U.S. Army.

At the age of 20 he was buried in Virtue Cemetery in Concord, Tennessee.

In addition to the Interstate 75 bridge memorial designations, others in his name are located in front of the Loudon County Courthouse and at the Lenoir City Hall and Highland Park Elementary School.

At Fort Bliss, on the border of Texas and New Mexico, the large gym and track are named the Mitchell W. Stout Physical Fitness Center.

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(If you have additional information about one of Mr. Summers' articles or have suggestions or ideas about a future Chattanooga area historical piece, please contact Mr. Summers

