Army Aviation Hall of Fame 2012 Induction

Staff Sergeant James “Pappy” Coleman

Staff Sergeant James “Pappy” Coleman epitomized the DUSTOFF medic: completely fearless, professionally expert, and totally dedicated to life saving. There was no soldier who served with this man who would not want him above all others to be their medic if they were wounded in battle. He was among the most highly decorated medics of the Vietnam War. He was also one of the most competent and courageous.

He trained and led a group of medics with the 498th Medical Company and 54th Medical Detachment in Vietnam who evacuated and treated over 21,000 patients in a nine month period; flying 28 combat missions and carrying 70 patients on average each day in a unit that had an aircraft hit every 4-5 days. Each of these medics earned the Purple Heart and Coleman was wounded twice yet refused to leave his unit. In addition to 2 Purple Hearts he earned 3 Silver Stars, a Distinguished Flying Cross, 2 Bronze Stars, both for valor, an Air Medal for valor plus numerous other Air Medals. He was involved in the evacuation and treatment of some 4,000 patients in over 1,600 combat missions in one year, earning him the reputation throughout his area of operations as “Super Medic.”

On hundreds of missions, in numerous minefields and countless bullet-swept battle zones, Coleman tread where others would not. He saw his fellow soldiers, and his own helicopters, shot over and over and went back again and again.

Perhaps his whole attitude about the dangers of his job was best expressed after a bullet passed between his lips filling them with blood. When a fellow soldier rushed to his aid, Coleman quipped through the blood, “I am good to go. I just kissed the bullet that had my name on it.”

He left the Army with 18 years of service to care for his family and was inducted into the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame in March 2008.